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Christ as made known to the
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CHRIST AS MADE KNOWN TO THE
ANCIENT CHURCH.

CHRIST AS MADE KNOWN TO THE
ANCIENT CHURCH:

AN EXPOSITION

OF

THE REVELATION OF DIVINE GRACE,

AS UNFOLDED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES.

✓ BY THE LATE

ROBERT GORDON, D.D., F.R.S.E.,

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CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

I.

THE VISION OF ISAIAH:

ISAIAH I. 1, 2

I PURPOSE to offer some remarks on certain portions of the writings of Isaiah, as I have already done on some of the historical books of the Old Testament; and I would take occasion, from the passage before us, to say a few words on the general plan and design of my expositions.

In entering at first on a series of discourses on the Old Testament Scriptures, my chief object was to show that Christ is everywhere to be found in them;—that in fact the main subject of all the divine communications which were vouchsafed to man after the fall, was the Covenant of Grace,—the divine plan for delivering men out of their estate of sin and misery, and bringing them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer. Of course, I do not mean by this remark to say, that this formed the one only subject treated of in the books of the Old Testament, or that every thing recorded there had a direct and obvious reference to Christ. We find, for example, many historical narratives there, both of individuals and of nations, which do not imme-

diately bear on the divine plan of redemption, or on the person and character of the Redeemer. And such narratives serve great and important purposes, though we may not see any thing in them that immediately suggests or sets forth Christ. They reveal to us a great deal of the character and perfections of God, and of the principles of his moral government as the sovereign ruler over all. But neither are they unconnected with Christ and his mediatorial work, though, at first sight, they may appear to be so. On the contrary, they form an essential part of the method which God was pleased to adopt, in making known his purpose of mercy in the salvation of sinners. It seemed meet to him in his infinite wisdom to reveal that purpose gradually, and by successive communications, extending over a period of nearly four thousand years. In each of these communications there was some enlargement, or some new illustration of what had formerly been revealed concerning the Saviour; so that his character and work were more fully and clearly unfolded.

But these successive revelations were not so many separate and direct announcements from heaven, which might have been made at any time, simply declaring more than had previously been declared concerning Christ. They were all of such a kind, and made in such a way, as to have a direct reference to the condition and circumstances of the Church at the time they were made. Not only did they form so many additions to the knowledge of the Church in all subsequent times, respecting the Saviour's work, but they were peculiarly adapted to the necessities of the people of God to whom they were first made,—so much so, that not a little of their force and meaning depended on the circumstances in which the Church was at the time placed. In illustration of this remark, I might refer to any of the more striking types of Christ that are to be found in the Old Testament. Take, for example, the passover. That ordinance was not merely a clearer illustration of the truth taught by animal sacrifice from the beginning, that the blood of atonement could alone turn away divine wrath. It actually did so. The people of God were at that moment exposed to the execution of that wrath which was desolating Egypt; and the blood of the passover lamb saved them. Take, in like manner, the pillar of cloud that guided Israel, or the smitten rock that supplied them with

water. These types did not merely tell the Church of all future times that the promised Saviour would be to his people "as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." They were really all this to the Church of that time. The people of God were actually in a dry and parched wilderness, and the types which represented Christ as guiding and refreshing his Church did in reality guide and refresh them.

And who does not see the force and meaning which these types of Christ derive from their adaptation to the necessities of the Church at the time they were given? And if this was the method which God in his infinite wisdom saw meet to adopt, in revealing to the Church the purposes of his grace and mercy in Christ,—and if it was farther his good pleasure to record this gradual manifestation of his gracious design,—then it was an unavoidable and necessary thing that the Bible should contain a great deal of history, inasmuch as, without that history, we could not have understood the true meaning, or seen the full force and beauty of much that foretold and prefigured the Saviour. We see, moreover, in his way of unfolding the plan of redemption, a very interesting proof of God's gracious care of his Church in all times; showing, that if his people in one age enjoyed a less clear and less complete revelation than they did in another, the deficiency was, in some measure, compensated or made up for by the manner in which the revelation was made. No doubt, we now see, or may see, a great deal more in Old Testament types than Old Testament saints ever saw in them. But, on the other hand, these types were to the Church of that time, what they are not to us,—namely, the medium by which God did directly convey to his people the assurance of his presence to comfort, or support, or deliver them. I may, therefore, return to the statement with which I set out, regarding the Old Testament Scriptures, that Christ is everywhere to be found in them; or, as it is most emphatically expressed in Scripture itself, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

It was this view of the subject that led me at first to enter upon a series of discourses on the Old Testament Scriptures. I never attempted, indeed, and I never intended to offer any thing like a regular commentary on them. I could not venture on so

great a work. My object was to direct attention to some of the more obvious and striking intimations which these books give us of Christ and his mediatorial work, believing that it could not be an uninteresting or an unprofitable exercise to trace the gradual development of the great plan of redemption, and to contemplate the care which was graciously taken to keep that plan steadily in the view of the Church, through all the changes and revolutions of many successive generations. I had the impression, too—perhaps an erroneous one—that the historical books of the Old Testament were not so carefully studied by many as they ought to be, or that the types and promises of Christ which they contain are too frequently regarded as separate and detached statements, without considering them in connection with the history in which they occur, and from which they derive not a little of their force and meaning. I was not without the hope, therefore, that such a series of discourses might, by the blessing of God, impart information to some, and suggest a new train of thought to others, and lead all of us to dwell with more profound admiration on the unity of design which runs through the whole Scriptures,—that of gradually revealing the counsel of God for the salvation of his Church.

With these impressions and hopes I entered upon the subject, and endeavoured, as God enabled me, not only to exhibit the leading promises and types whereby, from the beginning, God was graciously pleased to set forth Christ to the faith and hope of sinners, but to bring them forward in such a way as to present something like a continuous history of the Church,—her faithfulness and her backsliding,—her consequent prosperity or adversity,—her relation to the ungodly world without,—and God's gracious dealings with her in the way both of deliverance and of chastisement. I cannot, of course, enter now on any thing like a recapitulation of the important subjects which have thus passed under our review. But I cannot refrain from attempting, in a few sentences, to present an outline of what has been well called the history of redemption, from the first intimation of a Saviour to the period at which we had arrived in our expositions,—namely, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. That first intimation, as every one will remember, was made, not directly, by a

promise to our first parents, but indirectly in the curse pronounced upon the serpent who had tempted and ruined them, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

This intimation contained the whole gospel,—the promise of a triumphant but suffering Saviour, who by his death was to destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. And the promise being given, it was followed up by the institution of animal sacrifice,—an institution in which the promise itself was illustrated and confirmed, and by which they who believed the promise were experimentally made partakers of the blessings which it involved. The ordinance of animal sacrifice illustrated the promise, by most emphatically intimating that it was by the shedding of his blood that the promised Saviour was to accomplish his great undertaking, that of destroying the works of the devil; and the same ordinance gave the believing offerer actually to experience the blessings conveyed in the promise, inasmuch as the acceptance of his sacrifice was a pledge that his sins were forgiven him, being transferred to the victim that was slain.

Such was the marvellously simple provision which was made from the beginning for revealing and applying to believers all the benefits of Christ's redemption. And provision was also made for preserving the promise in all its simplicity, and the ordinance in all its purity, during the period when there was no written record of the divine revelation. The life of man was extended to eight or nine hundred years; so that the original revelation escaped the danger of being corrupted and misunderstood in passing by tradition through a succession of short-lived generations. Mankind, however, did nevertheless become so corrupt that God in righteous judgment brought in "the flood upon the world of the ungodly,"—Noah only and his family being preserved. To him the promise or covenant was renewed and confirmed by signs or tokens, that of animal sacrifice still occupying the chief place, and being itself rendered still more significant and emphatic by the strict injunction laid upon Noah not to eat blood when permission was given him to eat animal food. When men did again lapse from the service of God, and when the promise of the Saviour was in danger of being corrupted

or forgotten, God was pleased to select Abraham, in whose family that promise might be preserved, and more fully unfolded, and at last fulfilled. To this favoured individual, who received the honourable appellation of the "father of the faithful" and the "friend of God," the covenant promise was renewed, and in terms more explicit than had before been employed; and in regard to his family, the events in their history were so ordered as to furnish a succession of most significant types, wherein Christ, in his person, and character, and work, was so fully foreshadowed, that these very types still furnish to believers the most vivid representation of the various relations in which the Saviour stands to his redeemed people. In illustration of this remark, I need only refer to the deliverance of the children of Abraham from the bondage of Egypt,—their journey through the wilderness,—their passage over Jordan,—their entrance into Canaan, the land of promise,—the subjugation and partition of that land by Joshua,—and the final settlement of the people there in the inheritance which God's right hand had purchased. And while the great leading events in the history of Israel were thus rendered subservient to the clearer revelation of the promised Saviour and his work, there were many occasions besides on which God was graciously pleased to interpose, and to render particular incidents in that history significant types of Christ.

But, among all these representations of the Saviour, and of his mediatorial work, the original ordinance of sacrifice still occupied the first and most prominent place. It was to render this ordinance more solemn, more significant, and more complete, as setting forth Christ in all the fulness of his priestly office, that Moses was instructed to rear that wonderful fabric, the tabernacle, in the wilderness of Sinai. That tabernacle, in which the typical representation of the great atonement and of its blessed effects may be said to have been perfected, was taken down when the people journeyed, and set up again as often as they rested on their way to the land promised unto their fathers; and, at last, on their arrival there, it was permanently erected by Joshua at Shiloh. On the death of Joshua, and of the elders that outlived him, a grievous apostacy took place in Israel; for they forsook the God of their fathers, and went after the gods of the nations whom they had driven out. Shiloh became neglected,—the ark

of the covenant, which constituted the strength and glory of the tabernacle, was separated from it,—and through the presumption of the people, and of the priests, the sons of Eli, it was taken by the Philistines, and carried to the house of their idol. In the language of the psalmist, Israel provoked the Lord “to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand.”

But a time of revival came. The word of the Lord, which had long been precious, there being “no open vision,” was again revealed to Samuel. David, too, was employed to repair the disasters which Israel had brought on themselves by their back-sliding, being honoured also to bring up the ark of the Lord to Mount Zion, and to place it in a tent which he had pitched for it there. And, finally, Solomon received permission and instructions to build an house for the Lord, where the ark might occupy the place which it had formerly occupied under the mercy-seat in the Holy of Holies, and in which the tabernacle service instituted by Moses might be re-established, not only in all its fulness, but in still greater magnificence than before. And, accordingly, God condescended to take possession of the house as his dwelling-place; for the cloud, even “the glory of the Lord filled the house of God;” and the Lord said concerning it, “Now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.”

We cannot conceive how any addition could have been made to the typical or figurative method thus employed for setting forth Christ in all the fulness of his mediatorial work, and for imparting to believers the blessings of that mediation in the acceptance of their offerings and their services. And while the typical system was thus completed and made permanent, the direct or verbal revelations concerning Christ had been greatly enlarged by the communications vouchsafed to David, “the sweet psalmist of Israel,” and which he expressed in sacred songs descriptive of the “sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow,”—hymns with many of which the people must have

been familiar, as being used in the temple service and on other solemn occasions. And besides all this, David as king of Israel, and all the kings of his line, so far as they walked in his ways, were themselves types of Christ in his kingly office; so that when Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord, and before he had begun to backslide, the Church was put in possession of a revelation of Christ, and of the way of acceptance with God, partly prophetic, but chiefly typical, but so plain and significant, that we could hardly conceive any thing more that could be done to impart consolation and good hope to believers, short of the appearance of the Great Antitype,—the manifestation of God in the flesh, in very deed dwelling with men on the earth. And, doubtless, there were innumerable multitudes who, in the faith of what was thus revealed, did enjoy a comforting sense of God's forgiving mercy, and that, too, even during the degeneracy which followed on the declension of Solomon, so long as the temple stood and was accessible to devout and believing worshippers. No doubt, the clearest of these revelations were but shadows of the better things that were to come, and which have now come. But though shadows, they were very true, very faithful, very perfect representations of the substance, and were fitted, and, we cannot doubt, largely blessed, for keeping alive the faith and hope of the Church.

These revelations, however, especially in so far as they were typical, gradually ceased to accomplish the great end for which they were given. Immediately after the death of Solomon, ten of the tribes revolted against the house of David, and established themselves as the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam, who, in order to perpetuate the revolt, persuaded his subjects to relinquish all thoughts of going up to Jerusalem to the house which God had chosen to put his name there, and to be satisfied with the idol-worship which he established at Dan and Bethel. Judah and Benjamin in the meantime adhered to the worship of the true God, as established in the temple at Jerusalem; and thither also resorted from Israel, when permitted to do so, those who were really true believers, and who knew the value of these ordinances whereby God spake peace unto his people, and was wont to manifest to them his glory in the sanctuary. But gradually Judah became infected with the idolatry of Israel.

The throne of David was, from time to time, occupied by kings who openly adopted and encouraged the worship of false gods. The house of the Lord, from being forsaken by all but the small remnant, the faithful few who feared, and loved, and worshipped the God of their fathers, came at last to be desecrated by the erection of idolatrous images within its walls, as if in daring defiance of Jehovah to vindicate his own honour and sovereignty. By one king it was altogether shut up, and by more than one was it impiously polluted, as I have now described; and though, from time to time, a pious king was raised up who repaired the house of the Lord, and re-established the service thereof in something like their original purity, and succeeded in bringing the people outwardly to observe the divine ordinances, yet idolatry continued to gather strength,—the profession of adhering to the worship of God became, on the part of the people at large, more and more hollow and hypocritical,—and, at last, God delivered them into the hand of the king of Babylon, and thereby executed the threatening which had been addressed to Solomon at the same time with the promise already quoted, regarding the temple in Jerusalem, that God would put his name there for ever: “But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a by-word among all nations. And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the Lord done thus unto this land, and unto this house? And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.”

In the terrible calamity which thus overtook Judah, the Church, the faithful remnant who really feared the Lord, had, of course, their share, and experienced in common with their brethren all the hardships of a foreign invasion followed by defeat, and by their being carried captive into a heathen land. But that calamity was a source of suffering to them altogether

unknown to their brethren at large, who looked no farther than to the temporal disaster which had befallen them. They might have been ready to conclude that the Lord was about to cast off his people for ever, and to give up his heritage to perpetual desolation; and even though they might still hope that sooner or later God would again visit and redeem his people, and raise up an horn of salvation for them in the house of his servant David; yet they saw, in the destruction of the temple, the utter overthrow of those ordinances in which they and their believing fathers of many preceding generations had enjoyed access to God, and communion with him, and by which mainly their faith and hope had been kept alive. This must have been to them a source of suffering far more severe than any privation of a mere worldly nature; and that suffering they must have begun to experience, from the moment that they first saw the house of God forsaken, or shut up, or desecrated by their idolatrous kings and apostate priests. If, therefore, no new communication had been made to them regarding God's purposes, or no new means employed to sustain and comfort them, their faith might have been ready to fail under dispensations which must have appeared to them so dark and mysterious. But God had neither forgotten nor forsaken them. As the time approached when the purity and integrity of the temple and its ordinances were to be encroached on, and ere that desecration of the house of the Lord had begun, which was to terminate in its being forsaken of God, as Shiloh had been forsaken, and in being given up to destruction, prophets were raised up who were specially commissioned to prepare the people of God for the calamities that were coming upon them, and, at the same time, to give them new assurances, that however overwhelming and irremediable these calamities might appear to be, God had not forgotten his promise sworn to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and would still prove to be the faithful and covenant-keeping God.

Among these, and one of the most prominent of them, was Isaiah. It is not certain that he was the earliest of those prophets whose prophecies were committed to writing; for Hosea and Micah exercised the prophetic office at the same time at least that he did, if not before him. But the fulness and extent of the revelations

that were made to him are sufficient to account for his prophecies occupying the first place in the collection of the prophetic books. We are here told then, that he prophesied "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah ;" and in so far as he refers to the men of his own time in Jerusalem and Judah, his writings and the histories which are recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles must materially throw light on one another. I need hardly observe that it is of importance to bear this in mind in perusing these portions of Scripture ; especially if we would estimate aright the nature and extent of those reformatations which did, from time to time, take place under the government of a godly king. The very first chapter of this book exhibits a most melancholy picture of the ungodliness and profligacy of manners which characterised Judah at the time to which it refers ; and even if we should suppose it to have been written in the days of Ahaz, who was the worst of the kings under whom Isaiah prophesied, inasmuch as he first profaned, and then shut up the house of the Lord ; yet, if such was the deep and apparently hopeless degradation to which the people had sunk in the time of Ahaz, there is too much ground to fear, as I have formerly had occasion to remark, that the reformation which took place in the next reign, under Hezekiah, and at the very beginning of it, was with vast multitudes only an outward reformation, not a real turning to God. While the history gives us the external state of things, the prophet presents to us the character of Judah as they appeared in the sight of God. The prophet did thus directly appeal to the consciences of men, and that with infallible truth and faithfulness, inasmuch as he only gave utterance to the word which the Searcher of hearts had put into his mouth. Of course, the object of the solemn charges which he brought against them, and of the terrible judgments of which he forewarned them, was that they might be convicted, convinced, and converted, and that so the fierce anger of the Lord might be turned away.

But his commission extended to the true Church also,—to those who remained steadfast in God's covenant. He showed them, by his addresses to the backsliding and ungodly, that matters were much worse in Judah and Jerusalem than they supposed, even with all that they saw and lamented of abounding iniquity ; and

he warned them, moreover, that it was all but a hopeless thing that the judgments which he threatened should be averted. Even in this there was great kindness to them, inasmuch as it went directly to prepare them for the worst. But this was not all that he was commissioned to tell God's true people. In this very chapter he has a word of comfort for them; for there he tells them that if the judgment had been delayed, or was yet to be averted, it was on their account, and by their instrumentality; for after setting forth, in the most expressive language, the general revolt of the people from God, he adds, "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah."

The true people of God were very few; but they were still, to Jerusalem and Judah, what ten righteous persons would have been to Sodom. And as, at the very outset, he thus assures the faithful remnant that God will prove to them a faithful and covenant-keeping God, so he continues throughout to comfort them with exceeding great and gracious promises; for it cannot have escaped the notice of any one who is at all familiar with the book of Isaiah, that the most alarming of his threatenings, and even those predictions of judgment which appear not conditional but absolute, are constantly followed, and sometimes very abruptly, by the most animating assurances of the great things which God was to do for his people. It is thus that while none of the prophets predicted in stronger language, or with greater certainty, the calamities that were coming on Judah; so none of them received a larger commission than he did to "speak comfortably to Jerusalem," and to cry unto her, that "her warfare should be accomplished, that her iniquity should be pardoned; for she should receive of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

But while the prophecies of Isaiah must have been peculiarly precious to believers of his own time, comforting them under the trials which they already experienced, and preparing them for others which they were yet to undergo, it was not for any one age of the Church that these prophecies were designed,—no, not even for all the subsequent ages of the Jewish Church alone. To that Church, no doubt, they were peculiarly valuable, inasmuch as they set forth Christ, his character, and work, and kingdom, not only very fully and clearly, but in language specially fitted

to keep alive their faith and hope amidst the manifold trials and vicissitudes which the Church underwent from the time of the Babylonish captivity till the actual appearing of the promised Messiah. But to the Christian Church these prophecies are in reality not less precious. When we read what Isaiah foretold of the incarnation, sufferings, and death of the Lord, and of the consequences of the righteousness which he thus wrought out, in the pardon and acceptance of sinners before God, we must feel, not only that we are perusing an account that cannot be mistaken of the person, and character, and work of Jesus of Nazareth, and, therefore, the most incontrovertible evidence that he was the Saviour promised from the beginning; but also that what we read forms as it were a portion of the New Testament record,—necessary, so to speak, for completing that record, and bringing fully before us the mediatorial work of Christ, and its blessed fruits.

When the people of God are in search of spiritual comfort, knowing that it is in believing views of the love, and tenderness, and compassion of the Saviour that they will find it, in what portion of Scripture will they find such views unfolded in greater variety or richer abundance than in the writings of Isaiah, where the provision which Christ has made by his Spirit for reviving and refreshing the hearts of his people is set forth in every form of speech, and in every variety of figure? And if the Church is at any time cast down and discouraged, because of abounding iniquity, and because of the opposition by which the progress of the gospel is resisted and retarded, what is better fitted to revive her hope and stimulate her to new efforts than the many sublime descriptions which Isaiah gives of the glory of the latter day,—the sure triumph of the gospel,—the full and final establishment of Christ's kingdom over all the kingdoms of the world?

From the day that these predictions were uttered till the present time, they have quickened the zeal and sustained the exertions of God's people in their endeavours to advance the Redeemer's cause. When first delivered, the fulfilment of them was very distant, and it may be distant still. But the sure word of prophecy is a pledge that these predictions will be fulfilled, and, therefore, a pledge also to the Church at all intermediate periods, that is, at all times, that she shall never be utterly over-

borne; that whatever tribulations she may pass through, and whatever may be the sufferings which particular members or large portions of her may endure, the gates of hell shall never prevail against her,—nay, that these very tribulations will serve to quicken and revive her, and contribute to her ultimate triumph. And, in truth, this is the only consideration that can furnish a motive to the people of God for sustained exertion in the cause of Christ. Were they to be influenced only by the prospect of what they were to witness in their own day, oh, how soon would they sink into utter hopelessness and indolence! But, animated by a holy zeal for the Redeemer's glory, they will look to the ultimate triumph of his cause, however distant it may be, with satisfaction and delight, and will be contented to labour on, believing that their exertions, their work of faith, and labour of love, have their place assigned them in that wonderful plan by which the Saviour is preparing for the establishment of his own kingdom.

It has been God's method of dealing with his Church from the beginning to make the greatest, the richest, and the best of his promises very distant in their fulfilment. Abraham, for example, went to Canaan with some ground to expect that he might be put in possession of it as his right, to the extent that he was able to occupy it. When he came there, he was told for his comfort that his descendants should possess it after the lapse of four hundred and thirty years. Poor comfort this for a worldly mind seeking its own worldly enjoyments; but the purest comfort to Abraham, who desired above all things that in him and by him God should be glorified. And such is the only legitimate motive for exertion in promoting the cause of truth and righteousness; and if we would have this motive kept alive and in vigorous operation, let us betake ourselves frequently and seriously to the writings of Isaiah. There we shall find much to minister to our own consolation, and much to animate us in seeking to show forth the Redeemer's praise. We shall find that it is not on the ground of one or two detached passages that he has acquired the title of the Evangelical Prophet. His book is full of the gospel, for it is full of Christ; and if it may be said of the Old Testament generally, it may be very emphatically said of his writings, that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

II.

THE LAST DAYS.

ISAIAH II. 1-4.

THE expression, "the last days," is very commonly used by the prophets to denote the time of the Messiah,—the new dispensation which was to be introduced by Christ himself. In the passage before us, this must be the meaning of the phrase, inasmuch as the state of things here described never obtained, either in the prophet's own lifetime, or at any future period in the history of Jerusalem and Judah previous to the coming of Christ. Isaiah, indeed, witnessed a great outward reformation in Judah under Hezekiah; another, equally extensive, and apparently still more thorough, took place in the reign of Josiah; and after seventy years' captivity in Babylon, the Jews returned again to their own land, rebuilt the temple on Mount Zion, and re-established there the worship of the God of their fathers. But on none of these occasions, nor at any future period in the history of the Jews under the old dispensation, was there any approach to such a flourishing state of the true religion as is here described, even among the Jews themselves, and far less among the other nations of the earth.

That the passage under consideration does set forth a very flourishing state of religion, even the general prevalence of vital godliness with all its blessed consequences, both among Jews and Gentiles, must be obvious to every one on the very first reading of it, and without any inquiry into the peculiar import

of the language employed. The prediction, then, of such a state of things must be full of interest, wherever and in whatever connection we may find that prediction introduced. But in the present case that interest is increased by the occasion on which the prophecy was spoken, as that appears from the connection in which we find it recorded. It forms the introduction or preface to a prophecy of a very different kind; for, from the sixth verse of this second chapter down to the close of the third, we find the prophet setting forth, in the strongest language, the general ungodliness and profligacy which prevailed in Jerusalem and Judah, and foretelling, in language equally strong, the terrible calamities which were assuredly to overtake them. It is not, then, at the commencement of such a solemn rebuke and threatening, that we would naturally have expected, perhaps, to find a prophecy of so animating and encouraging a character as that contained in the passage before us. And yet we may easily see how skilfully and seasonably it was adapted to the condition of both classes of men in Judah;—I mean the ungodly on the one hand, who, I fear, formed the great body of the people, and true believers on the other,—the faithful remnant who still adhered to the Lord God of Israel. In regard to the latter, the true people of God, the prediction in the passage before us was fitted, and, no doubt, graciously designed to prepare them for the heavy tidings with which Isaiah had been sent to them, and which he was about to deliver.

These tidings, which announced coming judgments, and judgments so appalling, might have crushed them into despondency, as if God was about to cast off his people for ever, and had forgotten any more to be gracious. But the prediction of the future glory of Zion, as recorded in the passage under consideration, when all nations should flow to it, was a pledge to them that God had not forgotten the covenant sworn to Abraham, even the precious promise that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed; and a pledge, therefore, to themselves also, that whatever might be the calamities which they were to witness or share in, their interest in the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant was secured. And, with regard to backsliders in Judah, the great multitude who had forsaken the true God, and turned aside after idols, the prophecy in the passage before us was, in

reality a severe reproof to them, and one fitted to place their guilt before them in a very aggravated light. It told them that the house of God which they despised, and the worship of which they had become weary, would one day be eagerly sought after by all nations; and that the heathen, of whose idols Judah was so enamoured, would forsake their false gods, and "ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward," saying, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." Nothing could place in a stronger light than this prediction did, the folly, the guilty infatuation, of Jerusalem and Judah, in forsaking the Lord for dumb idols, changing their glory for that which did not profit. The prophet's prediction, then, was at once a severe and a gracious rebuke. It was an attempt to influence them, by the consideration which Moses foretold would one day influence backsliding Israel, and to which we find the apostle also referring, "I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you."

But if we would see how full the prophecy in the passage before us is both of encouragement and reproof, not only in reference to Judah of old, but to the Church still, we must examine more particularly the import of the language in which it is conveyed. And the first subject of inquiry is, what we are to understand by "the mountain of the Lord's house," and by what is here said of it, that it "shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills." There can be no doubt that this mountain was that part of Zion on which the temple was built,—namely, Moriah,—but which is usually spoken of in Scripture by the general name of Zion. There was no other place that could be called the mountain of the Lord's house,—the house of the God of Jacob. Of this mountain, then, it is said, that it "shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills,"—that is, other mountains and other hills shall be brought together, as it were, and piled on one another, so that Mount Zion, being placed upon them, may over-top them all, and be visible to the ends of the earth.

Every one, of course, will readily perceive that this is figurative language, and is not to be understood as meaning that the

material hill of Zion is literally to be so elevated. But every one will as readily perceive that the language is very emphatic and full of meaning, as denoting some remarkable distinction, whereby Mount Zion was to be rendered more renowned than any other mountain in the earth. And what this distinction was to be is very plainly stated in the third verse, where it is said, "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Already, indeed, had Zion been distinguished above all places of the earth; for when David carried thither the ark of the Lord, and celebrated that event in a sacred song, he represented the other hills and mountains as envying Zion for the honour and glory put upon it, by the ark of God being deposited there. "The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever." And still more distinguished did Zion become, when, at a future period, God condescended to permit a house to be built there for his name; when Solomon did build a house exceeding magnificent, of glory and of fame in all lands; and when it was said of it, "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."

But great as was the distinction thus put upon Zion, the prophecy before us foretells that its former glory was to be thrown into the shade, as it were, by the surpassing glory with which it was to be crowned in the last days, when it should be established in the top of the mountains, and should be exalted above the hills. And this prediction would have been gloriously fulfilled, independently of all other considerations, in the personal appearance there of the Son of God, the true Shechinah, the brightness of the Father's glory, "and the express image of his person." But it is to the consequences of Christ's appearing that the prophet especially refers, as constituting the exaltation and glory of Zion. And these are summed up very concisely, but very comprehensively, in the clause of the passage already referred to, "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." It was this that was to constitute the special glory of Zion in the last days. To a certain extent, indeed, this had always been the glory of Zion; for there God

had taken up his abode,—there he had accepted the offerings and sacrifices of his people, showing them the ground on which they were received into his favour, and thence giving forth from the holy oracle the communications of his will for their reproof, and encouragement, and instruction, as their circumstances might require. All the light, however, which thus emanated from Mount Zion, under the old dispensation, glorious as it was when contrasted with the thick darkness which covered the nations, was but like the twilight, or the dawn, as compared with the glory of the last days here foretold, and, moreover, was confined to the land of Israel, the dwelling-place of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh.

The light foretold in the passage under consideration was not only to be unspeakably brighter in itself, but was to illuminate the whole world; for Christ was sent to be “a light to lighten the Gentiles,” as well as to be the glory of his people Israel. Still, it was to be from Zion that this light was to emanate, and from the house of the Lord which stood there. And so it was. Christ appeared in the temple there, fulfilling the prediction of the prophet Haggai, “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former.” It was in the temple that he proclaimed himself the light of the world, saying, “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” It was in Jerusalem that he commanded his disciples to begin their apostolic labours, when he said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” And accordingly it was in Jerusalem, and in the very temple itself, that the apostles asserted and enforced those great truths by which they were to be witnesses for Christ, not only “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea,” but also “in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” From Zion, then, the mountain of the house of God, emanated that glorious light which revealed to men of every country and every tongue, that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;” and how truly, therefore, might it be said of that mountain, that it was “established in the top of the mountains,” and “exalted above the hills!”

In the next clause of the passage under consideration, the prophet proceeds to foretell what the consequences would be of this exaltation of Mount Zion, whereby an invitation was held out to the whole Gentile world to come and participate in all the privileges which had heretofore been confined to the Jews. "All nations," says he, "shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob." I need hardly remark, that this language is no more to be understood literally than was the language used in the preceding clause respecting the mountain itself, when it was said that it should be "established in the top of the mountains," and "exalted above the hills."

At the time of which the prophet here speaks, it would no longer be necessary for Gentiles who wished to participate in the privileges of the Jews to betake themselves to Jerusalem, and to be admitted as proselytes to engage in the temple service on Mount Zion. It was the time of which our Lord himself spoke, when he said to the woman of Samaria, "Believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." By that time, the ordinances of the Mosaic economy, having served their purpose, would be removed, that they might no longer prove a wall of partition, shutting out the Gentiles from the privileges of the Jews. The hour would then have come when the true worshippers would worship the Father in spirit and in truth. When it is said, therefore, in the passage before us, that "all nations shall flow unto it," it cannot be understood literally as meaning that multitudes from all nations would actually flock together to Jerusalem. But the language does very emphatically express the eagerness with which all nations would inquire after and embrace the glorious revelation of grace and mercy, which, as we have already seen, was to be sent forth from Zion, where the Lord himself delivered it, and where, by the outpouring of his Spirit, he appointed and qualified his disciples to be his authoritative ambassadors to sinners of every country and of every name. Wherever, therefore, the word of reconciliation which had been committed to the apostles in Mount Zion, and which they were to carry thence, and proclaim throughout all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the utmost part of the earth; wherever, I say, this word of recon-

ciliation was received and embraced as glad tidings of great joy to the guilty, it might be truly said of such as so received it, that they went up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he had taught them of his ways, and that they had begun from that hour to walk in his path.

In receiving the doctrine of the apostles, they acknowledged the authority of the commission which the apostles had received at Jerusalem, and they participated in all the blessings and privileges of Messiah's kingdom, as fully as they could have done if they had personally gone up thither, for out of Zion had gone forth the law,—not merely the law in the strict acceptance of the term, but the revelation of the will of God generally, as the word frequently denotes,—for out of Zion had gone forth the law to them, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And every one knows that countless multitudes, in all countries, did, in consequence of the labours of the apostles, thus flow unto the mountain of the Lord's house, saying, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob:" for in every country the apostles were honoured to be the instruments of turning sinners from darkness unto light, and persuading them to be reconciled unto God; and in every country they established churches which recognised Jerusalem as the mother of them all. Still, however, these churches did not embrace whole kingdoms or communities, and in no case, perhaps, even a majority of any one community; and the question, therefore, may perhaps occur, Does the prediction in the passage before us refer at all to any past period of the Christian Church? We certainly have not yet seen "all nations flowing unto the mountain of the Lord's house," in the sense in which we have interpreted that expression; neither have we witnessed among the nations of the earth any thing approaching to the state of things described in the next verse, where it is said, "They shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more;" and it may be asked, therefore, Is not the fulfilment of the prophecy before us still altogether a future thing? In reply to this question, I would observe, that though the full meaning of the prophecy was not exhausted by the events which followed the resurrection of Christ and the

ministry of the apostles, it does not, therefore, follow that the prediction has no reference to that period at all. There can be no doubt that a time is yet to come, to which the language of the prophet will be applicable in a larger and more literal sense than it has yet been to any past period in the history of the Church,—a time when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither learn war any more.

But there can be as little doubt, I think, that the prophecy in the passage under consideration does also and largely apply to the first introduction and the subsequent spread of the gospel,—the law which went forth from Zion,—the word of the Lord which issued from Jerusalem. The prophet could not, of course, give in a few sentences the history of the Church,—the progress of the gospel from its commencement to its full and final establishment. But he might give, and I believe has given, its commencement and its close, showing what it was fitted and designed to effect, and what it would assuredly at last effect. With regard to the intermediate period, the application of his prophecy to it must be understood with the qualifications or limitations required by other Scripture statements. Now, it is very plainly and frequently intimated in Scripture, that vast multitudes, nay, the great majority, will continue long to disbelieve and reject the gospel; and during that period, therefore, we cannot expect to find any thing like the fulfilment of the words before us. But while the passage foretells the final triumph of the gospel over all opposition, it describes also its spirit and its tendency, what it is designed to effect, and how it is fitted to effect it. And, in this view of it, we find it largely fulfilled in apostolic times, when many people did go and say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.”

In farther explanation of the manner in which the gospel was to produce its blessed effects, the prophet goes on to say, “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people.” The prophet does not expressly tell us who is meant by the word, He. It must refer, then, to the person mentioned in the preceding verse, where it is said that the word of the Lord should go forth from Jerusalem. It is of the Lord, therefore, even Messiah, that it is said, “He shall judge among the nations, and

shall rebuke many people." And in this single sentence the prophet gives us a very comprehensive account of the government or rule which Christ exercises over his Church. It is by his word, we are told, that he so governs or rules,—of course, by his word carried with power to the understanding and the conscience by his Holy Spirit. And this word so wielded is irresistible. It is the rod of Christ's strength, whereby he subdues his people into obedience, and executes judgment on his enemies, as we are elsewhere plainly taught in Scripture. Thus, in the 110th Psalm, it is said to him by the Father, "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." In the 2d Psalm, it is in like manner said to him, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." And both these passages are still more fully explained, and shown still more clearly to refer to the word of Christ, by this same prophet, when he says of Messiah, in the 11th chapter, "But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."

It is by "the law," then, which has gone forth from Zion, and by "the word of the Lord from Jerusalem," that he, even the Lord Christ, judges among the nations and rebukes many people. There is no external force, no outward coercion authorised, or which can be legitimately employed in Christ's kingdom. But, as has been well observed, there is in Christ's word a power stronger far than all external force; and by this word all his victories are achieved. Among the children of men, he finds none but enemies,—obstinate and determined enemies; for all are by nature "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them,"—enemies to God in their heart by wicked works. All, therefore, require to be subdued and brought into subjection, if Christ is to reign; and all will be subdued in one of two ways,—either made willing in a day of divine power, or brought under that rod of iron wherewith Christ breaks his enemies. This power of Christ's word in subduing men unto himself is a matter

of experience to all true believers. They are conscious that there was naturally in their hearts an aversion to God and holiness which no created power could have subdued,—an hostility which no human argument or influence could have disarmed,—nay, an hostility which, many may remember, maintained its ground for a time even against the word of Christ, when it began by the Spirit's influence to fasten upon the conscience, to drag into light their secret sins, to set before them the solemn sentence passed upon transgression, and to show them the rectitude, and holiness, and truth of Him who has passed this sentence, and with whom, as the Lawgiver and Judge, they have to do. But they were at length subdued. The word which thus laid hold of their conscience lost not its hold till it had brought down their stout-heartedness by the terrors of the divine law, and won their alienated affections by the manifestation of divine love. And being thus subdued and made willing by the word in the day of divine power, they continue to be trained, and disciplined, and made meet, by the same word, for the enjoyment of the inheritance to the hope of which they have been begotten again.

I need not tell believers that it is to the word that they betake themselves in seasons of depression and spiritual darkness; and that there, and there only, while they peruse it in an humble and prayerful frame of mind, do they expect to find light and enlargement. But they are indebted to the word also for what they might not be so ready to seek in it, as they are to seek for consolation and encouragement,—I mean correction and reproof. Christ has provided that there shall be in his Church pastors, or teachers, and rulers, for the edification of his body; and to the instructions and government of these teachers and rulers, he has required his people to attend. Whether, therefore, it be the word of doctrine, and of reproof, and of correction, which these office-bearers give forth, or whether it be the discipline of Christ's house which they exercise, they are warranted to expect that his power will accompany it, and render it effectual for the correction or the recovery of his people, according to their spiritual condition.

To the ungodly and unbelieving, the reproof thus administered, or the discipline thus exercised, may appear a very contemptible thing, unless in so far, perhaps, as it may bring with it some worldly discredit to those who are the subjects of it. And, on the

other hand, where there is much ignorance and superstition, such discipline may be converted into a terrible engine of spiritual tyranny for enthralling and holding in bondage the consciences of men; and, in point of fact, the so-called discipline of the Church has been employed to a fearful extent for this purpose in the Church of Rome. But it is still true, nevertheless, that the administration of reproof, and the exercise of discipline, according to the rules which Christ himself has laid down, will be accompanied with his power, so as to be rendered effectual for the correction of his own people, and for their recovery from backsliding and sin. And if, in regard to others, they are only hardened in their sin by that which was designed to soften and subdue them, the power of Christ will be manifested in the righteous retribution which will be awarded to them, when "with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked." And thus it will be made manifest in regard to all, that by "the law" which has gone forth out of Zion, and by "the word of the Lord from Jerusalem," Christ "shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people."

In the last clause of the passage under consideration, the prophet has exhibited a very glowing picture of the blessed effects of Christ's judging and ruling among the nations, "And they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." I have already had occasion to advert to the undeniable fact, that the state of things here described has never yet obtained among the kingdoms of the world, and that if ever it is to be realised to the letter, then the complete fulfilment of the prophecy is still a future thing. Even those nations that are called Christian have, to the great scandal of the Christian name, exhibited hitherto a character the very opposite of what is here described. But why? Just because though Christian in name, they have not been, and are not yet, Christian indeed and in truth. And this consideration suggests a view both of the prophecy and of its fulfilment, in which we are all immediately and personally concerned. It is very plain that the outward state of peace and harmony among the nations which is here described, was not the whole of what was presented to the eye of the prophet when he foretold it;

as if that state of things constituted of itself all the blessed effects of Christ's ruling among the nations. External concord among the kingdoms of the earth, though very desirable for its own sake, in all circumstances, and from whatever cause arising, is here spoken of only in so far as it was to be the blessed fruit of Christ's Word sown in men's hearts,—the holy effect of the sanctifying power of his Spirit subduing and making them willing, —even the willing subjects of Christ's spiritual government.

Peace and concord may exist, and even be carefully maintained between nations, from motives of worldly policy and views of worldly interest, while, at the same time, a spirit of selfishness and jealous rivalry may be cherished on both sides, and may be ready to break out into the bitterest hostility whenever circumstances occur to call it forth. But need I say that this is not the peace and concord foretold in the passage under consideration. The peace of the last days, which the prophet foresaw in vision, is the peace which arises from the extinction or subjugation of those selfish, ambitious, and vindictive passions which give rise to wars and fightings among men; passions which are subdued by the power of Christ's Word and Spirit operating upon the heart. And if so, then how largely may the prediction in the passage before us be fulfilled, though that fulfilment is still far short of the state of things here described? It cannot be doubted that the prophet meant to assert, what is in accordance with the tenor of Scripture, that when the nations of the earth become truly Christian, truly the disciples of Him whose word has gone forth from Jerusalem, they shall exhibit the character here described.

And must not this, then, be the character of all who really are the disciples of the Lord Jesus? Though there may not be, as I fear there is not, any one nation of the earth of which a majority, or any thing approaching to a majority, are really Christian; yet those of every country who are Christian should be, and, if they are true to their principles, will be, united to those whom they know of every other country, and to one another, in the bond of love and affection. They may not be so numerous as, by their influence and example, to produce such concord between their respective countries. But, on this very account, the spirit of love and peace which prevails among themselves, and by which

they are mutually bound to one another, may be expected to be more palpable, and more easily recognised even by the world around them. It was so in the primitive times of the Christian Church, when even the persecutors of the apostles took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus,—when their first converts who had lands and possessions sold them, and brought the price, and laid it at the apostles' feet, that distribution might be made unto the brethren as their circumstances required,—and when for a considerable time it was said of them even by the heathen, “See how these Christians love one another!”

Here was the manifestation of the principle which, if universally prevailing, would produce literally all that is foretold in the passage under consideration. It never has yet universally prevailed, and does not now. But should not this very consideration stimulate believers to make it more obvious and palpable in their own character, so as to show that there is a principle at work which, when fully developed, will produce all the glorious results foretold in the passage before us? Has this principle, then, been implanted in our heart? Is our character such that if all other men of all countries were like us, universal love and harmony would reign? It is not enough to say, that we should rejoice if men would beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; that nation should not lift up sword against nation, neither should learn war any more;—we may wish all this, and still have very low and unworthy views of the prophet's meaning,—nay, may be utterly blind to the spiritual import of his prophecy. The question is, Are we such that if all men were like us, the prevailing feeling would be supreme love to Christ, and unfeigned love to one another, because we reflect Christ's image?

Much is said in these days about the millennium. Would we feel ourselves at home if the millennium should begin to-morrow? Is it so much our desire, our prayer, and our constant endeavour, to have our selfish, proud, jealous, angry, and vindictive feelings subdued, that we would feel ourselves happy in the society of those whose master principle is love to Christ, and love to one another for Christ's sake? It is only in so far as we have attained, or are striving to attain, to this state, that we can have any rational ground for rejoicing in the coming millennium; and I

fear that not only a more extensive spread of the gospel, but a much higher standard of Christian character is necessary to realise in all its fulness the prediction in the passage before us, that the people "shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

III.

THE GLORIOUS BRANCH.

ISAIAH IV. 2-6.

THE first verse of this chapter should have formed the last verse of the preceding. It closes, and in a very emphatic manner, the description of the desolate condition to which Jerusalem and Judah were to be reduced by the judgments that were coming upon them. The prediction of these judgments occupies the greater part of the second, and the whole of the third chapter ; and though there is too much ground to fear that the prediction was but little regarded by those who stood most in need of the warning,—that is, by the people generally,—yet there was enough in it greatly to depress the faithful remnant of God's people, and to fill their minds with the darkest forebodings. In tenderness to them, therefore, as well as for the encouragement of the Church in all after times, the prophet was instructed to introduce his message of judgment with a glorious prediction of the prosperity of the Church in the last days, when all nations should flow to the mountain of the Lord's house, and when there should thus be fulfilled the promise made to Abraham, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." And as the prophet, before announcing the heavy tidings with which he was charged, gave the Church a new assurance that, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, God would still prove to be the faithful and covenant-keeping God ; so, having delivered his message, foretelling calamity and desolation, he proceeded again,

in the words before us, to speak comfortably to God's people, assuring them that the desolation which he foretold, however wide-spread it might be, should not make a full end of Judah, nor prevent the fulfilment of any one good word which the mouth of the Lord had spoken concerning Zion.

In his former prediction, recorded in the first four verses of the second chapter, he had dwelt especially on the prosperous state of the Church in the last days, when Gentiles should participate in the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. In the prediction before us, he refers especially to the glorious person by whom these great things were to be achieved. He speaks, not of the threatened judgments being averted, or of Judah repenting and turning unto the Lord, so that his fierce anger might be turned away from them. On the contrary, the very prediction in the passage under consideration; by which he sought to comfort the hearts of the faithful remnant, assumed that all the judgments which he had foretold would assuredly be executed; for he represents them as only a remnant that were to escape the threatened calamity. But concerning that remnant he foretells great and gracious things,—the doing of a glorious person, who was to carry into effect all that had been foretold in prophecy or foreshadowed in type concerning the redemption of the Church. "In that day shall the Branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel."

I have said that a glorious person is here foretold, who was to do great things for the escaped or the remnant of Israel; and it will readily occur to all who are familiar with the language of the prophets, that I refer to the person who is here called "the Branch of the Lord," or "the Branch of Jehovah," and, moreover, that this person can be no other than Messiah or Christ. The word Branch is frequently used in the Old Testament Scriptures to denote a person, and that person is in most, if not in all cases, Christ. Thus, in the 80th Psalm, where the psalmist is praying that God would restore the Church,—the vineyard that had been wasted and laid desolate,—he says, "Look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. . . . Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon

the Son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself." Here it is plain that "the Branch" is just another name for "the Son of man," whether the Son of man means Christ, as I think it does, or some other deliverer, whom the psalmist prayed that God would strengthen for repairing the desolations of Zion.

In this same book of Isaiah, we find the word Branch used plainly to denote Christ; as when it is said in the first verse of the 11th chapter, "And there shall come forth a rod," or shoot, "out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots;" and also in the 53d chapter, where the same figurative expression is used to designate the promised Messiah, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." The prophet Jeremiah, too, uses the same word to foretell a great king and a glorious deliverer, who could be no other than Christ. Thus, in the 23d chapter, he says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." And again, in the 33d chapter, "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely." And the prophet Zechariah, who prophesied after the return of the Babylonish captivity, employs the same name or title in foretelling Christ, as a name with which the Church was familiar. Thus, in the 3d chapter of his book, it is said, "Behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH." And again, in the 6th chapter, "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH," who is already known by that name; "and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be as a priest upon his throne."

These passages leave no room to doubt that the expression in the passage before us, "The Branch of the Lord," or, "The Branch of Jehovah," means the glorious person so frequently foretold under that title, even Christ. And there can be as little

doubt that by "the fruit of the earth," we are to understand a farther description of the same person. It is plain, from the passage itself, that the two expressions, "Branch of the Lord," and "Fruit of the earth," refer to the same subject, whatever that may be, inasmuch as the prophet ascribes to both the same qualities, and represents them both as serving the same gracious purposes towards the Church,—namely, that both should be "for beauty and for glory," or "for excellence and comeliness," to the remnant of Israel. If, then, the subject of the prediction be a person, that person is here presented to us in two different points of view,—first, as the Branch of the Lord proceeding from heaven; and second, as growing out of the earth: in other words, Christ as the Son of God, and as the Son of David. And in confirmation of this view of the verses before us, it were enough, perhaps, to refer to the passage in Zechariah, already quoted, where it is said that the Branch, the glorious person who was to build the temple of the Lord, and bear the glory, and sit and rule upon his throne, a Priest and a King, was to "grow up out of his place," or, out of his ground, or, from below,—that is, in the words of the passage before us, was to become "the fruit of the earth."

But, at a still earlier period, we find similar predictions of Messiah, setting him forth as at once the eternal Son of God, and as appearing in the lowly condition of the Son of man. Thus Micah, who was cotemporary with Isaiah, says, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Isaiah, too, has himself elsewhere expressed, in a single word, the substance of what is said in the verse before us, when he foretells Messiah under the name, Immanuel, which signifies, "God with us." And the same view is obviously presented in another passage, where he says, "Unto us a child is born,"—evidently Christ in his human nature,—“unto us a Son is given,”—as evidently the Son of Him who gives, or Christ in his divine nature; "and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

It is of Messiah, then, that the prophet here speaks, under the description of "The Branch of the Lord," and "The fruit of the

earth;" and he says of him, that "he shall be beautiful and glorious," and "excellent and comely," "for them that are escaped of Israel,"—that is, for the remnant, of whom he says farther that they "shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem." This language, of course, implies that judgments were coming, from which a remnant only would escape,—that this remnant would be blessed by the Messiah,—and that the ungodly would be cut off, or separated. And this the prophet proceeds to state still more explicitly and fully; for, in the next verse, he declares that this happy and prosperous condition of the Church would be brought about "when the Lord should have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and should have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning."

These judgments were executed, to a very considerable extent, when the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah were carried away captive into Babylon. In the disasters which preceded and accompanied that event, vast multitudes of the ungodly perished,—the wrath of God fell upon Jerusalem because of the blood that had been shed there; and something, therefore, like a separation took place between the nominal and the true Church, when it was found that the true Church was indeed no more than a remnant. This remnant was, in due time,—the time foretold by the prophet Jeremiah,—brought again to their own land; Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt; and the Church, as compared with the state of things that obtained before the captivity, when idolatry, and blood, and crime, in every form, characterised Jerusalem, was in a pure and prosperous state,—the Lord having "washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion," and having "purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning."

But though the vision which was presented to the prophet did, no doubt, embrace the return of the Babylonish captives, and the re-establishment of the temple-worship at Jerusalem, purged from all the abominations of idolatry, yet that vision was not limited thereby. Though the restoration of the remnant was a pledge for the due fulfilment of all the divine promises, still the prediction in the passage before us was not thereby fulfilled. He whose name is the Branch had not yet grown up out of his

place; and it is not, therefore, till after he appeared, that we are to look for the accomplishment of that sifting and separating process which is here ascribed to "the spirit of judgment," and "the spirit of burning." But the prediction was very largely fulfilled in all its parts immediately after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, when the disciples received the Holy Ghost, and entered on their apostolic labours. A separation did then take place between the faithful remnant, even every one who was "written among the living in Jerusalem," and those who continued unbelieving and impenitent, such as had never before been witnessed in the history of the Church. The Spirit of God wrought mightily, by the ministry of the apostles, on the consciences of men, convincing, converting, and sanctifying them, so that "there were added unto the Church daily those that should be saved;" while they who rejected the Spirit's witness, and put away from them the gracious offer of the gospel, remaining hardened in their impenitency, were given over to the righteous judgments of God, and to all the consequences of that wrath which was coming upon them to the uttermost. To the one class the apostles were "the savour of life unto life," and to the other "the savour of death unto death."

The Spirit, working by the doctrine which the apostles preached, tried men, as men had never before been tried, shutting them up to the alternative of receiving or rejecting his testimony, making that testimony palpable by signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts, according to the will of God,—bearing witness with the spirits of those who believed, that they were the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,—and testifying to the consciences of those who believed not, that they must abide the consequences of their unbelief; or, in other words, giving them over to the righteous judgment of God. The very bitterness which the finally impenitent and unbelieving manifested towards the followers of Jesus,—as, for example, when they heard the things which Stephen spoke, "they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth," and "cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him,"—I say this very bitterness showed how deeply their heart and conscience had been stirred, and how they were reduced to the

necessity of choosing whether they would surrender themselves to Christ, as Saul was constrained to do, or deliberately resist the Holy Ghost, as Stephen declared they did, and so be forever separated, or cut off from the Church of God, "by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning." And this separation between the believing and the unbelieving, between the holy and the profane, between the true worshippers and hypocrites,—in a word, the separation between the true Church and the world,—was more palpable, more clearly seen, than it had ever before been.

The apostles, indeed, were not infallible in their judgment of men, so as never to recognise as a believer one who was a hypocrite. But their doctrine was infallibly true and alarmingly searching, so that a hypocrite could hardly remain at ease in their company. And, besides, when hypocrisy was detected, the word of the apostles, rebuking that hypocrisy, was accompanied with a power which might truly be called "the spirit of judgment," and "the spirit of burning." Witness the case of Ananias and Sapphira, on whom the judgment of God was visibly executed, and witness the effect of that judgment in preventing other hypocrites from professing to join themselves to the apostles and their company, that is, the company of the faithful. When Ananias heard the solemn rebuke of Peter, he "fell down and gave up the ghost; and great fear came on all them that heard these things." Sapphira, also, was visited in the same way; and the statement is repeated, that "great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things; . . . and of the rest," that is, of the unconvinced and unconverted, "durst no man join himself to them," though "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women."

Such was the power that accompanied, not the miracles, but the word of the apostles; and such is the power with which the same word still is, and ever will be accompanied, though its effects may not be so palpably manifested. In every instance of the conversion of a soul to God, there is the same operation of the Holy Ghost as in the case of the first converts; and, in regard to those who hear, but who reject the Gospel, there must be the same hardening of heart, and the same strengthening of the enmity against God, which characterised unbelievers in the times

of the apostles. That enmity may not now appear in so violent a form. But may not this be accounted for, in part at least, by the fact, that the Church,—the people of God,—are satisfied with a low standard of holiness, so that the hypocrite, or self-deceiver, is not afraid to join himself to them? When the time comes, however, for which we are taught to look, and long, and labour,—even the time, not only of a greater extension of the Church, but of a higher standard of purity and holiness,—the prediction in the passage before us will be fully accomplished. Then the separation between the Church and the world will be made palpable. “And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy,”—that is, shall be holy,—“even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.”

This purifying and separating process, as we have seen, was very largely exemplified in apostolic times. And so were the other parts of the prediction contained in this passage. “In that day,” says the prophet,—the day when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion,—“in that day shall the Branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel.” It is thus foretold of the Church, the remnant of Israel, not only that they would have spiritual discernment given them to see the glory and the divine excellence of the Saviour, but that they would glory in him as their honour,—the source of all the beauty and comeliness that was put upon them. And this was very largely fulfilled in the case of the apostles and primitive Christians. Of the unbelieving Jews, it is elsewhere said by this same prophet, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.”

But, in striking contrast to this, he here foretells of the remnant of Israel, that, in this same root out of a dry ground, they

would see a divine comeliness and beauty. And so they did. The evangelist John says, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." Even in the days of his humiliation, when he was despised and rejected of men, it was given to the disciples to say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." And of the exalted views which they entertained of the majesty and glory of Christ, after they had received the Holy Ghost, we have manifold proofs in the writings of the apostles. It is a subject to which they frequently advert, and on which they dwell evidently with feelings of the most profound admiration. They speak of him as "the image of the invisible God," the Creator and "the heir of all things," "the brightness of the Father's glory," "and the express image of his person," as "exalted far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion," and as having received "a name which is above every name;" and as the consequence of these exalted views of Christ, of his power and character, and work, they gloried in him as their Lord and Master, and in their dependence on him as the fountain of all the honour and glory to which they were to be exalted. "In the Lord," says this same prophet, "shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

And so it was with the apostles and the primitive Church. Of the apostles generally it is recorded, that "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame" for the name of Christ. The apostle Paul declares of himself, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." And, writing to his Philippian converts, he says, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice," or glory, "in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." And the apostle, in seeking to comfort his afflicted brethren, says, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified." And the Spirit did rest very largely on the apostles and first Christians; for when did the world ever behold such a spectacle as that which the primitive Church presented,—

a spectacle so fair, so lovely, so glorious? It was not, indeed, a spectacle in which the world could see any thing to admire, for they who could see no comeliness or beauty in the Saviour himself would see none in his image as reflected in his followers. On the contrary, if the world persecuted him, it would also persecute them, and the more bitterly in proportion to the closeness with which they resembled him. But, in their zeal for God's glory, in their devotedness to the Saviour, in their love for one another, in their benevolence towards mankind generally, in their untiring efforts to do good to all men, in their meekness and patience under injuries, and in the purity and holiness of their lives, they were honoured to present a sight which the world had not before seen, and on which every holy, intelligent creature might have looked with admiration. How different was this from the kind of honour which the apostles themselves did at one time so fondly hope for! and how largely was the prediction in the passage before us fulfilled to them, "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beauty and glory, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellence and comeliness for the remnant of Israel!" I do not say that the prediction was exhausted in them. We are taught to hope there will still be a more extended, at least, if not a more glorious fulfilment of this and of similar prophecies.

But what a change must take place, not only in the state of the world at large, but in the condition and character of the Church herself, before that fulfilment can be effected; for, alas! how little does the Church now resemble what the Church was in apostolic times! Every true believer must see and lament this: and how earnestly, therefore, should every believer pray that the Spirit of glory and of God may rest more abundantly on his people, that they may glory in Christ, and that Christ may be glorified in them!

The prophet, having described the internal state of the Church, that is, her spiritual character and condition, at the time to which his prophecy refers, proceeds, in the last two verses, to foretell the gracious manifestations of the divine favour with which she should be visited: "And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night:

for upon all the glory shall be a defence." The language of this prediction must have been to believing Jews peculiarly expressive. It is taken, as every one will readily perceive, from God's gracious manner of dealing with Israel, when he brought them out of Egypt, and conducted them through the wilderness, where he went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, at once to guide and to protect them. This cloud of glory, it will be remembered, rested over the mercy-seat in the tabernacle which Moses erected in the wilderness, and, in like manner, took possession of the house of the Lord which was built by Solomon on mount Zion; and so long as the Church was faithful, that cloud of glory was the sure pledge of the divine presence and protection. It was, however, confined to the temple, that being the place which God had chosen to put his name there. But in that which the prophet foresaw in vision, he foretells that "upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies,"—that is, upon all the assemblies of the Church,—there should be this cloud by day, and this fire by night. We cannot, of course, understand it literally as meaning that the Shechinah, or cloud of glory, should be seen actually resting on every dwelling-place, and on every assembly of God's true worshippers. But it means something far higher than any outward visible symbol of the divine presence. It means that very presence itself, by the Spirit communicating to his people all needful supplies of grace, strengthening, refreshing, and comforting them. And it is especially said that it was to be for a protection: "For upon all the glory," that is, upon all that is glorious, "shall be a defence."

We have already seen what it was that the prophet foretold was to be glorious in the Church. It was the honour, and the comeliness, and the beauty which her great Head was to put upon her, when he endowed her with the gifts and graces of his Spirit, and exhibited in her the reflection of his own divine image. And upon all this glory there was to be a defence, as precious things are wont to be defended. The Church, it will be remembered, is called in Scripture "the Lord's peculiar treasure." Thus, in the 19th chapter of Exodus, the Lord thus addresses the people of Israel, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto

me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." And the apostle Peter, in obvious allusion to that passage, thus describes the portion of the Christian Church to which he wrote, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,"—a people purchased at great expense, and preserved with great care. Over all the glory, then, the prophet says, there was to be a defence. It was not, indeed, to be such a defence as should place them beyond the reach of trial, or prevent them from being assailed by their enemies. In the next verse, where this defence is more fully described, there is a very plain intimation that the people of God might lay their account with trials, and these, too, very severe: "And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain."

By "the heat" some understand persecution, as the word elsewhere in Scripture plainly signifies; and by the "storm" and the "rain," the judgments of God upon the nation or country to which the Church may belong. At all events, the people of God, even of that time to which the prophet refers, are here warned that they might expect various and severe trials. Still, upon all their glory there would be a defence. God would be present with them by his Spirit, so refreshing them by a sense of his love, so inflaming them with zeal for his glory, and so strengthening them to endure, for his name's sake, that they would be preserved from falling from their steadfastness, and so prevented from forfeiting and losing any of that beauty and glory where-with they had been adorned, and by their preservation of which God was to be glorified. It is this, I apprehend, that is mainly to be understood by the defence of which the prophet here speaks. And, in this sense, the promise was largely fulfilled, as we have seen that the rest of the prophecy was fulfilled, in the experience of the primitive Church. In so far as they were tried, their trial proved like that of gold,—they shone the brighter, and will "be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." They met the threatenings of rulers and councils with a calmness and serenity which confounded their adversaries, and made it more manifest that the power of Christ rested

upon them. And it was under the defence here promised that they were strengthened and emboldened to do so.

This, indeed, was not the only way in which this promise was fulfilled to the primitive Church. Though they did suffer much persecution, and were subjected, on various occasions, to very severe trial, yet there was a very marvellous manifestation of divine power in laying restraints on their enemies. From a combination of various political causes, which I need not detail, the persecution which the apostles and their converts in Jerusalem and Judea experienced was very light compared with what might have been expected, when it is remembered that the great body of the Jews,—almost, indeed, the whole Jewish nation,—were irritated against them far more bitterly and more ferociously than even the Gentiles were. In proof of this, I need only refer to the fact stated in the Acts of the Apostles, that, after the martyrdom of Stephen, when “there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles,” in a short time after all this “had the Churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” This was, no doubt, a very wonderful respite; and the Church could not fail to see in it the hand of God throwing over them his shield and buckler.

But gratefully as they must have felt and acknowledged all this, they must have felt also that their main defence was the presence of the Spirit of the Lord working mightily in them and by them,—strengthening them to endure any thing rather than tarnish the glory wherewith their exalted Lord had adorned them, by any compromise of principle or any dereliction of duty. And we are not in a healthful frame of spirit, nor in a very safe state, if this is not the kind of defence which we are most anxious to experience. I fear that we may be too prone to interpret such promises as that in the passage before us, in a way most agreeable to our carnal inclinations,—that is to say, as promises of deliverance from outward trouble and worldly suffering. God may, indeed, have included such deliverance in these promises, where it seems good for his glory and for the interests of his Church. But he has given us no warrant to expect or reckon upon it in

any given case; while, on the other hand, he has given us a full warrant to ask and expect that he will create a defence over us, so that we shall be enabled, in spite of all opposition and trial, to maintain our steadfastness, and to bear testimony for him and for his truth in the face of all adversaries.

There are many, I fear, who are disposed to think that there is so much true religion in our land, that God will not permit it to be overwhelmed with such calamities as from time to time overtake other lands,—that, in fact, he cannot do without us, inasmuch as, without our instrumentality, his cause cannot be carried forward. Alas, for the miserable delusion! Such a sentiment does but too clearly prove that we are more anxious to escape worldly trial, than to have grace given us so to endure it as thereby to glorify God,—more anxious to secure our worldly comfort, than to be adorned with the beauty of holiness, and thereby to reflect the image and show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. And with such sentiments and feelings, with what confidence can we reckon on a defence of any kind? Let us remember that the defence promised is not merely or mainly for our protection from personal affliction and worldly calamity, but for our preservation from backsliding and apostacy, whereby we should give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. It is not upon our persons in reference to outward trial, but “upon all the glory,” that there “shall be a defence.”

IV.

THE SONG OF THE VINEYARD.

ISAIAH V. 1-7.

EVERY one must see, on simply reading this passage, the general scope and meaning of the parable which it contains. That is, indeed, very plainly, though very concisely stated in the seventh verse. The people of Israel are here represented under the figure of a vineyard ; and the privileges by which they were distinguished, and the effects which the right improvement of these privileges might have been expected to produce, are set forth by a minute description of the labour and care which a wise and judicious master or lord of a vineyard expends, with a view of making it fruitful, and of the reasonable expectation and pleasure with which he looks forward to the time when he is to reap the fruits of all his care and culture. In like manner, the backsliding and degeneracy of Israel, and their grievous abuse of the privileges by which they were distinguished from all other nations, are very expressively represented by the same vineyard, when, instead of bringing forth grapes at the appointed season, it brought forth wild grapes. And, finally, the judgments which were coming upon Jerusalem and Judah, because of this their worse than barrenness, notwithstanding all that had been done for them, are placed in a very appalling light by the figure of the vineyard laid waste and desolate, when its hedge should be taken away, and its wall broken down,—when it should be trodden under foot of all that passed by,—when briars and thorns

only should spring up therein,—and when the very rain of heaven should be withheld from it. All this must be very obvious to every one at first sight as the general scope and meaning of the parable, especially when the comprehensive explanation in the seventh verse is taken into account: “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.”

But though, even at first sight, and on the most cursory view of it, the design of the parable is very plain, and fitted to suggest very solemn and instructive reflections, yet we must believe that it was intended to be made the subject of a more careful examination than what is merely sufficient to discover its general scope and meaning. It is obvious that here we have a remarkable example of the marvellous condescension of God. He deigns to reason with men on the subject of his dealings with them,—nay, he appeals to themselves in vindication of these dealings: “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.” When God, therefore, condescends thus to remonstrate with men, enumerating the proofs which he had given of his compassion, forbearance, and unwearied kindness, and, on the other hand, setting forth the ungrateful return which they had made for all the goodness and the mercy which he had made to pass before them, we may expect to find, in the language which he employs, great force and depth of meaning, both as unfolding the glory of his own character, and as exposing the guilt and impenitency of men. The language here employed is, indeed, figurative; but it is not on that account less definite, while it is more expressive in exhibiting a vivid representation of the divine dealings with Israel, and of the perverseness of that people in their abuse of these dealings.

Let us consider it, then, a little more carefully. And I begin by observing that great force is given to the whole parable by the manner in which it is introduced: “Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard.” Whether the prophet in these words speaks in the name of God the Father, or whether he speaks in the name of the Church, it is plain that Christ is the person whom he designates the “well-beloved;” for by this title Christ is pre-eminently distinguished in

reference both to God the Father and to the Church. Not only in the New Testament is it declared repeatedly that Christ is the "beloved Son" of God, but in this same book he is thus foretold and described, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." And with regard to the Church, she is represented throughout the whole of the Song of Solomon as addressing Christ, and speaking of him by the title of "my beloved;" while, in other parts of the Old Testament Scriptures, as in the 45th Psalm, she is represented as standing in the same relation to Christ as that title expresses.

But that it is Messiah of whom the prophet here speaks is farther evident from the consideration, that to Christ was committed, from the beginning, the care of the Church,—those whom the Father had given him in covenant, and for whom, in the fulness of time, he was to become incarnate, and suffer, and die. And long before Isaiah's time, the Eternal Word had manifested himself to the Old Testament saints as exercising a special guardianship over them. He was known to Jacob as the angel which had redeemed him from all evil, and whose blessing he implored on the heads of the sons of Joseph. He was known to Moses as the angel who dwelt in the bush, and by whom were wrought all the signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. He was revealed to Israel, in their journey through the wilderness, as the angel that was sent before them, to keep them in the way, and to bring them into the place which had been prepared for them, and of whom God said unto them, "Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him." And he was manifested to Joshua, in the plains of Jericho, as the captain of the host of the Lord, who was to subdue Canaan before the children of Israel, and who gave Joshua a pledge of this by saying to him, "As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. . . . Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy,"—being the same language which he addressed to Moses out of the bush, when he commissioned him to go and bring Israel out of the land of Egypt. And if any farther proof were necessary that the prophet here speaks of Christ, it is furnished by our Lord himself, who spoke a parable, the same, not only in

substance, but also in the very language, with that before us, in which he represents himself as the heir, and, therefore, the Lord of the vineyard; and, moreover, warns the degenerate and unbelieving Jews of his time, that he will execute on them the very judgments which the prophet denounces in the passage before us. The glorious person, then, whom the prophet here speaks of, was no other than the second person of the Godhead, the Eternal Word, who was specially commissioned, and who willingly undertook to carry into effect all the gracious purposes of the Father regarding his Church, and who is elsewhere set forth in Scripture as the "desire of all nations,"—as "the messenger of the covenant," even the Lord, whom the people of God looked for, and delighted in,—the "well-beloved" of the Father, and the "well-beloved" of the Church.

The prophet, having thus briefly, but very expressively, described the glorious person with whom the house of Israel and the men of Judah had to do, proceeds to set forth the great and gracious things which that person had done for them, and the honourable distinction which he had put upon them in choosing them, and naming them his vineyard. "My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill." It has been well observed, that there is something in the nature of the emblem here chosen that is peculiarly expressive, as setting forth what might have been expected from a people whom God selected from the other nations of the earth, and distinguished by blessings and privileges which no other nation ever enjoyed. They are represented under the figure of a vineyard, each family being a plant, and each individual a branch thereof; and as the vine, unless it belies its nature, produces the richest, the most grateful, and the most generous of fruits, so they might have been expected to abound in all those fruits of righteous and godly living which would be to the praise and glory of God in the sight of the nations around them. This was the great and immediate purpose for which God selected Israel as his own peculiar people, even that they might be witnesses for him against an ungodly world, that they might be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory in the earth. And the care taken to secure this object is here very fully set forth.

The vineyard was planted "in a very fruitful hill,"—in other

words, Israel were placed in a land that was distinguished above all lands, possessing in itself every thing that could supply the wants and minister to the comfort of its inhabitants,—a land which is frequently and emphatically described in Scripture as a land flowing with milk and honey. No doubt, there rested upon it a special blessing, whereby it was rendered peculiarly, it may be miraculously, fruitful,—a blessing which might have made any land, whatever were its natural advantages, adequate to the support and the convenience of those whom God chose as his peculiar people. But Canaan, which is here called the “very fruitful hill,” is obviously spoken of in Scripture in such terms as imply, that, independently of any special or supernatural blessing which might render it “the glory of all lands,” it did possess very peculiar natural advantages, and that on this account, partly, it was selected to be the vineyard of the Lord, the dwelling-place of his people. “The land,” said Moses, “whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: but the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven.” And again, “The Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.”

All this implies that Canaan possessed natural advantages above other lands,—advantages so large that Israel would not need to be indebted to other lands for any of the necessities or comforts of life, and, therefore, would not, unless voluntarily, and from their own fault, be exposed to the temptation of being drawn away by the idolatry of the nations around them. But, in addition to these natural advantages of Canaan, a farther security was given to Israel against their being obliged or even tempted to betake themselves to other nations for any thing needful for their subsistence and their comfort; for after describing the land as “a land of hills and valleys,” drinking “water of the rain of

heaven," Moses assured Israel that God's favour to them would be unceasingly manifested in specially blessing it. "It is a land," said he, "which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." So true was it that the vineyard of the Lord was planted "in a very fruitful hill!"

Such, then, was the care with which a place was selected wherein the vineyard of the Lord might be planted; and the same care was manifested in all the means that were employed to secure its safety and its fertility: "My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and he fenced it," or "made a wall about it." Some have supposed that in these words there is an allusion to the natural position of Canaan, and to the character of the country, which rendered it difficult of invasion from without, and, therefore, easily defended from foreign enemies. But though this may be true, there can be no doubt that the words do mainly refer to that providential defence which God raised up around his people, and which no power on earth could ever have destroyed or broken through, had Israel proved faithful to God and to themselves. The nature of this defence had been announced to Israel at a very early period, even in the song which they were taught to sing on the shore of the Red Sea, saying, "The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them: all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established." And, accordingly, when they approached the border of Canaan, after their forty years' sojourning in the wilderness, the Lord said unto them, by Moses, "This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee." And this promise was fully and faithfully accomplished; for it

was declared to the spies whom Joshua sent to view the land, even Jericho, by one of the Canaanites themselves, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you."

Such was the shield of protection which was thrown over the armies of Israel while yet the conquest of Canaan was to be achieved, and such the defence which was placed around them after that conquest had been accomplished. It is true that, at a future period, the nations did frequently cast off the fear and dread with which the mighty works of the God of Israel had overawed them; and they did venture not only to contend with his armies, but even to boast that, in spite of his power and promised protection to his people, their gods had delivered their enemies into their hand. But they never did so until Israel had begun to show that they themselves could not confide in the supremacy and faithfulness of their own God. Had they never betrayed any such distrust, nor sought help anywhere but in the Lord their God, their fear and dread would still have lain on the nations that were round about them. They were thus, in their folly and infatuation, chargeable with the guilt of encouraging the heathen to think lightly, and of giving them occasion to speak reproachfully, of the only living and true God; and this was the very sin for which, mainly, they had been from time to time delivered into the hands of their enemies, and on account of which they were threatened in this passage with still heavier calamities. But if the wall of defence which had been raised around them did not always preserve them from the inroads of their enemies, it was because they did with their own hands break it down; for as often as they returned to God in penitence and faith, they found that he was still their high tower and rock of defence; and, accordingly, we find that, after many revolts on their part, and many consequent disasters, the original promise was again fulfilled in David's time, of whom it is recorded that his "fame went out into all lands; and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations." And while provision was thus made for the protection of the Lord's vineyard, means were employed also for rendering it fruitful. "He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof."

On the principle of interpretation which we have adopted, these words must be understood as referring to the expulsion of the idolatrous nations of Canaan. This, of course, was necessary, if the promise made to Abraham, that his seed should inherit the land, was to be fulfilled. And, accordingly, the people of Israel were expressly commissioned to cast out these nations; and while they entered on the enterprise by divine authority, they were sustained in the execution of it by a divine power. But the commission thus given to Israel is not to be viewed simply as the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." There was a purpose of judgment to be accomplished on these idolatrous nations, whose iniquity was filled up, and of whom it is emphatically said that they had committed abominations whereby the land was defiled, so that it spued them out. There was a purpose of mercy also to be effected towards the Church, so that, in the destruction of idolaters, and in the exaltation of those who feared God, he might assert and vindicate his own supremacy, and give all men to see that the God of Israel was the only living and true God. And, finally, preparation was to be made, by planting Israel in the land of Canaan, for the fulfilment of the great promise given to Abraham, even the coming of Him in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed. It was necessary, therefore, that the idolatrous nations of Canaan should be cast out. And for nothing was it more necessary than for this, that Israel might indeed prove to be the fruitful vineyard of the Lord. It was necessary, not merely because otherwise there would have been no room for planting the vineyard at all, but because, if these idolaters had remained, they would have ruined the vineyard when it was planted, by rendering it unfruitful, or so corrupting it that it might have been said of Israel, "Their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps."

One of the reasons, and a frequently repeated one, why Israel should utterly destroy the idolatrous nations of Canaan was, that if they spared them, these nations would assuredly prove a snare to them, and turn them away from God to their ruin: "When

the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee, thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: for they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly." And this prediction received a very melancholy fulfilment in the subsequent history of Israel. After the death of Joshua, they began from unbelief, and from fear, the consequence of unbelief, to make a compromise with those nations of Canaan that yet remained to be subdued, and did not utterly cast them out; wherefore the Lord said unto them, "I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." This was the beginning of that declension on the part of Israel, after they were settled in Canaan, which brought upon them so many disasters, and which ended in their being carried captive into a foreign land. If here, then, as in the defence which was erected round about Israel, there was any seeming failure of the divine promise, it was but seeming. The real failure was with Israel themselves. Joshua, immediately before his death, thus appealed to them, and they admitted the truth of his appeal, "Ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass concerning you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." God gave them the command to drive out the nations of Canaan, and he gave them the power also to execute the command. During the lifetime of Joshua, they exercised this power, and always successfully; and it was only when they became faithless that they became weak. Meanwhile, the Lord had made a wall about his vineyard, and had "gathered out the stones thereof."

Hitherto the parable has been setting forth the outward circumstances of the Lord's vineyard,—the preparation that was made for its safety, and for the fertility of the soil in which it was to be planted. In the next clause, we have the character of the vineyard itself, as it was originally planted by the Lord, or husbandman thereof: "He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine." Some commentators understand by this expression the patriarch

Abraham, whom God called out of the land of his fathers, and brought to Canaan, which he made over, by solemn covenant, to him and to his children after him, so that he was the original vine, from whom sprung the house of Israel, the vineyard of the Lord. It appears, however, to be more in accordance with the scope and tenor of the parable to consider the expression, "the choicest vine," as denoting the people of Israel when first established in the land of Canaan, and in the state in which Joshua left them at his death. That was, unquestionably, a very pure and spiritually prosperous period of the Church. The forty years' pilgrimage in the wilderness, during which all who were twenty years old and upwards when they left Egypt wasted away and were consumed, had been sanctified in a very remarkable manner to their children; for it appears that when Moses resigned to Joshua the accomplishment of the great work in which he had laboured with unexampled patience and with untiring perseverance for forty years, he delivered over to his successor a people the very opposite of what their fathers had been, in respect of piety towards God, and, consequently, of docility and submission towards their leader.

The people of Israel, we are told, did, through their officers, thus answer to Joshua, on certain commands which he had issued, "All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us we will go. . . . Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be thou strong and of a good courage." This pious pledge they were enabled nobly to redeem in their subsequent conduct; and when Joshua was about to leave them, and called them together, to give them his blessing and his last advice, he had the satisfaction of seeing them, with all earnestness and apparent sincerity, ready to renew their covenant with God, saying, "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey." And it is, moreover, testified of them by the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures, that they "served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel." Most certainly the Church,—the visible Church,—had never been, at any former period, at once so numerous and

so holy; and we are fully warranted, I think, to apply to them the language of the verses under consideration, and to assume that they were what is here called "the choicest vine," which at the beginning formed the vineyard of the Lord. But if there were any doubt upon the subject, it is, I think, entirely removed by the magnificent description of the purity and glory of the Church, under the same figure of a vine or vineyard, which we find in the 80th Psalm, and which, beyond all doubt, refers to the period of which we are speaking. The Psalmist is pleading with God to visit and refresh his heritage which was weary, even to revive and restore his Church which was under great tribulation; and one of the pleas which he urges is the great things he has done for his people in the old time, when he first brought them into the land of Canaan: "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt; thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself."

Such, then, was the choice vine which the Lord planted in his vineyard; and to complete his gracious work concerning it, he "built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein." He set up first, at Shiloh, by Joshua, and afterwards on mount Zion, by David and Solomon, the tabernacle of his glory, whither Israel might repair to offer their offerings of righteousness, to receive the communications of his will, through the prophets and priests, and latterly the kings, whom he set as watchmen to guard the interests of his vineyard, and whence they might carry with them those holy lessons, which, if learned and practised, would have made them to abound in all the peaceable fruits of righteousness. And having done all this for his vineyard, the Lord of the vineyard looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

The brief but most comprehensive and beautiful summary which is here given of the history of God's dealings with his ancient people, must have been perfectly intelligible to the men of Israel in Isaiah's time, especially to the men of Jerusalem and Judah. In the 7th verse, it is said, "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant,"—that is, the whole family of Abraham, though latterly divided into two kingdoms, Judah and Israel, constituted the vineyard, for which so much had been done to render it fruitful in all that was pure, and holy, and righteous, to the praise and glory of the Lord of the vineyard; but that Judah was especially his pleasant plant, because there the temple service survived the wreck of the true religion in Israel, and because also, perhaps, a Branch was, at a future period, to grow up out of Judah, far more glorious than any which had yet adorned the vineyard of the Lord. But whether there was any thing prophetic or not in the parable, so far as it was historical, setting forth God's past dealings with them, it must have been perfectly intelligible, and very solemn to the men of Judah; and, accordingly, in the third verse, the Lord himself is represented as speaking,—as appealing to the conscience of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah,—and as calling upon them to be themselves judges betwixt him and them: "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" And having thus, as it were, made their own conscience the judge, and knowing that though for a time that conscience might be so seared as not to pronounce a right judgment, yet it would one day be compelled to acknowledge the rectitude of his decision, he proceeds to announce the terrible judgment which was about to overtake them,—a judgment which, after what we have already seen, does not require any lengthened exposition,—being the undoing of all the gracious things which he had formerly done for them, and the withdrawal of all the privileges which he had once bestowed upon them: "And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up: and break down the wall

thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned nor digged: but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."

The whole subject admits of a large application to the visible Church of all times,—and the application is so obvious that it does not require any lengthened illustration, if men are but willing to see it. It were easy to show that our own land has been dealt with, to a great extent, as God dealt with Israel of old,—that here, too, in the days of our fathers, he planted his vineyard with choice vines,—and that, in later times, when he looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes. There is great force and depth of meaning in this statement. The Lord of the vineyard did not complain of Israel, that, as his vineyard, they brought forth nothing at all, or were utterly barren. The charge against them was worse than this. They seemed to bring forth grapes, fair and fresh to the eye; but when brought to the winepress, they proved to be wild grapes. And, to speak in the language of the parable, this was a more bitter disappointment than if they had borne no fruit at all; as this same prophet has shown, in the first chapter of his book, where he sets forth the offensiveness, in the sight of God, of the wild grapes of Israel and Judah,—that is, of their formal, lifeless, and hypocritical profession: "Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them." These were the wild grapes which the Lord's vineyard in Canaan of old brought forth. And have they not been brought forth in abundance in this our own land, by those who professedly call themselves the vineyard of the Lord? Did I enter on such an illustration of this truth as the history of our Church furnishes, since the day on which the Lord cast out the stones from our vineyard, and planted it with the choicest vines, I doubt not my illustration would meet with a

very large, perhaps a general acquiescence; and equally so if I should reckon up the various intimations of the divine displeasure with which our Church has been visited, especially in the withholding, at certain seasons, of the influence of the Spirit to accompany the Word and ordinances, or, as it is figuratively, but most emphatically, expressed in the passage we have been considering, commanding the clouds that they should rain no rain upon it.

But we may admit the truth of this general application of the subject before us, while we do not perceive how closely it applies to ourselves. There are few among us, I believe, if any, who, on reading what the Lord is here represented as having done for Israel, may not be reminded of what he has done for ourselves, in providing for us the means and the opportunities of becoming acquainted with the way of salvation. To us, therefore, he is making the same appeal that he did to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the men of Judah,—putting it to our conscience to say whether he could have done more for us than he has done. To this appeal, the best, the most faithful among us, will be the first to confess that the fruit which they have brought forth has at the best been but dry and shrivelled. But may there not be some, yea many, who have brought forth only wild grapes,—many who have been, and still are, contented with a name to live, while they are dead? They may not admit this; and, in answer to the appeal, their conscience may be so dead or so darkened as to pronounce sentence in their own favour. But it will not always be so. It has been said, in reference to this very passage, that God condemns none but those whom their own conscience condemns. And so it will be found in the end. It is, indeed, one of the most solemn considerations connected with the final judgment, that in Scripture the Judge is represented as reasoning the matter with those whom he judges, and showing them the ground of the sentence which he pronounces,—a very plain and awful intimation, that the ungodly themselves shall be compelled to acknowledge the rectitude of the judgment that is passed upon them,—that God will be justified when he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth.

V.

THE PROPHET PREPARED FOR HIS WORK.

ISAIAH VI. 1-13.

IN the 12th chapter of John's gospel, at the 37th verse, we find the prediction in the passage before us, along with another from this same book, thus referred to and quoted by the evangelist: "But though he," that is, Jesus, "had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him." From this reference or quotation by the evangelist, two things, I think, are very obvious,—first, that the judgment here threatened, namely, that of smiting the people with judicial blindness of mind, and hardness of heart, and searedness of conscience, was not to be fully executed till the time of the appearance of Christ. The judgment was, indeed, partially, nay, largely executed upon Israel and Judah, at the time of the captivity of the ten tribes,—of Israel, by the king of Assyria,—and that of Judah, by the king of Babylon. But it was still more fully and fearfully executed upon that generation of the Jews who rejected Christ; for the evangelist quotes the prediction

as spoken with a special reference to them. And so it is referred to by the other evangelists, especially by Matthew, and also by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans, all of whom speak of the judgment here threatened by the prophet as referring chiefly, nay, as if it referred exclusively to the Jews of Messiah's time.

And the second point, which is clearly established by the passage in John's gospel to which I have referred, is, that the glorious person whom the prophet in his vision saw, "sitting upon a throne high and lifted up," and whose "train filled the temple," was Christ, the Eternal Word, the second person of the Godhead, to whom, as Mediator, had been committed from the beginning the administration of all that concerned the Church. This, indeed, might have been inferred from the whole scope and tenor of Scripture doctrine; for it is plain that from the moment that man became a fallen and guilty creature, God, as the righteous Lawgiver and Judge, could hold no friendly intercourse with him, nor could make any gracious communication to him, either by word, or dream, or vision, but through a mediator. But none could be mediator between God and man, unless he were himself a divine person, even God, as the appointment of the Eternal Word to that office clearly testifies. And when, therefore, it pleased God to manifest himself to men by any visible appearance, and in a way of grace and mercy, it must have been by Him who was from eternity God, and who in the fulness of time was to become man; and of whom it is emphatically said, that from the beginning he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men. On this ground, therefore, we might conclude that the glorious person who appeared to Isaiah, in the vision here recorded, was the Son of God,—the same who had graciously appeared to his servants on various occasions, when the condition of the Church required special interpositions. And the conclusion to which we are thus naturally led by the general tenor of Scripture is confirmed by the express declaration of the evangelist; for he tells us that when the vision in the passage before us, and the communication which accompanied it, was vouchsafed to Isaiah, it was the glory of Christ that the prophet saw, and of Christ that he spoke, "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.'

The evangelist has thus furnished us with a key whereby to open up what would otherwise have been the hidden treasures of this remarkable passage; and we shall, accordingly, find that, keeping his commentary in view, we may see great significance in many parts of the symbolical representation, where the meaning would otherwise have been obscure. But, meanwhile, let us consider the passage a little with a reference to the prophet personally. He was about to be employed in a service more painful, perhaps, than any to which he had been previously called, and from which he might have been ready to shrink with dismay,—even to announce to the ungodly of his own time, and to record for the condemnation of the ungodly of future and distant generations, the fearful sentence that was to give them over to judicial blindness and final impenitency. This, it is obvious, was an unspeakably more painful service than merely to foretell temporal calamity and suffering. In foretelling these, the prophet might still have ground to hope that the very judgments which he foretold might be the means of bringing the sinful and suffering subjects of them to repentance. But the very nature of the judgment which Isaiah was now to be commissioned to foretell, necessarily excluded all such hope; and the commission, therefore, would undoubtedly have been to him a very appalling one. But he was prepared and qualified for undertaking it by the vision which was vouchsafed to him in the temple. In that vision, the glory of the Godhead was revealed to him, as far as human strength could bear such a revelation. He beheld the King, the Lord of hosts, “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.”

The effect of this manifestation of the majesty and glory of the Lord, and of the homage which was paid to him by the seraphims, was to awaken in the mind of Isaiah a very deep and painful sense of his own impurity and sin. We cannot doubt that, before this, he was one of the holiest, as he was one

the most highly-favoured of his time, and that he was no stranger, therefore, to those feelings of reverence, and awe, and self-abasement, with which godly men will never cease to contemplate the divine majesty and greatness. But when that majesty and greatness was visibly revealed to him, his feelings, both of reverence for the divine character, and of humiliation on account of his own, were so deepened as well nigh to overwhelm him. He felt as Job did when he exclaimed, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." It was not, I think, the fear that he would die, because he had seen the glory of the Lord, that oppressed the mind of Isaiah, as he contemplated the glorious vision that passed before him. It was his profound sense of what was due to the Lord of hosts, as infinitely worthy of the admiration, love, and worship of his intelligent creatures, combined with a deep and painful consciousness of his own unfitness to offer any service worthy of the divine acceptance, that almost overpowered him, producing something like a feeling of hopelessness as to his ever being qualified to serve the Lord or to advance his glory. He saw in the divine person who appeared to him all excellence and perfection,—every thing that could render him worthy of glory, and honour, and blessing, and praise; and he beheld the highest and holiest of creatures paying him the homage of their reverence, covering their faces and their feet in his presence, proclaiming aloud his praise, and waiting to receive his commands and execute all his pleasure. And when the prophet contemplated the homage of these holy and exalted creatures, and the glory of him who was the object of it, he felt, as Daniel did at a future period, that his comeliness was turned in him into corruption, and that he retained no strength. Being himself sinful, and living among sinners, he saw no service which he or his brethren could perform that could be acceptable to him who sat upon the throne: and he felt, therefore, as if he were hopelessly cut off from ever co-operating with the holy creatures that stood by that throne in showing forth the praises of the Lord of glory. This, I apprehend, is the import of what the prophet did himself say, when he was constrained to cry out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in

the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

This exclamation of the prophet is very expressive. It obviously implied, not only that, as a man of unclean lips, he was utterly unworthy of uniting with the seraphims in their song of praise to the Lord of glory, but that he felt it to be the greatest of evils,—his misery,—that he was not able to do so. In a word, he plainly declared that he would be happy if he could only share in the blessedness which those high and holy creatures enjoyed, in proclaiming the praises of Him who sat upon the throne. And in being brought into this state of mind,—in being made to feel that the advancement of the divine glory was the greatest and best of all ends at which an intelligent creature can aim,—he was, in a great measure, prepared for the commission with which he was about to be invested, and from which he might have shrunk, had he not, by the vision which was vouchsafed to him, been made to feel that all things must give way to the vindication of the divine sovereignty, and the manifestation of the divine glory. And being brought into this state of mind, he was soon delivered from all the desponding thoughts which had depressed him on account of his unworthiness to be employed in serving the King, the Lord of hosts. He was given to know and made to feel that he might be employed in the Lord's service, and that, too, in a very important way. "Then," says he, "flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Of course, we are not to suppose that by this language it was meant that Isaiah then, for the first time, was received into favour with God,—that then only he had the hope of the divine forgiveness, a sense of the divine favour, the assurance of God's love. Of all these blessings he had, without doubt, been already a partaker; and his experience of their blessed effects had been larger or more limited, according to the extent of his knowledge and the liveliness of his faith. But when the seraph, by the divine command, touched his lips with a live coal from the altar, the prophet received a new assurance of his forgiveness,—even an

outward, visible sign and confirmation of his being in a state of favour or acceptance with God,—an assurance which must have revived his heart, and greatly refreshed his spirit, while, with a deep sense of his sinfulness, he stood and gazed on the revealed glory of the holy Lord God.

But the significant act of the seraph, in touching the prophet's lips, implied more than merely a token that his sins were forgiven. It was a pledge, also, that his sin itself, the impurity or uncleanness of his lips, was taken away, so that he might be qualified for speaking the praises of the Lord,—or, in other words, be fitted for the execution of the office to which he was about to be called. And, accordingly, this assurance was no sooner given than it was verified in the prophet's experience. It appears that the seraph had scarcely executed his commission, when Isaiah "heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"—an expression, which I would observe, in passing, is a remarkable one, and which has been regarded, I think truly, as containing the doctrine of the Trinity, and as intimating that all the persons of the Godhead were concerned in the communication which was made to the prophet, and in the execution of the commission with which he was about to be invested.

But the point to which our attention is more particularly drawn is the conduct of the prophet on hearing the question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Though there seems to be no reason to suppose that he knew whither he was to be sent, or what he was to do, yet, having his heart enlarged by the assurance of the divine forgiveness and favour, and being quickened by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, he was prepared for any service on which he might be sent, anxious only to run in the way of the divine commandments. And, accordingly, his prompt and ready reply to the question which he heard was, "Here am I; send me." Whether Isaiah had previously manifested any reluctance to be employed as a divinely authorised messenger to his guilty countrymen, as others of the prophets did, we are not informed. But if he had shown any such reluctance, it was now altogether removed; and his only anxiety was, how he might serve the Lord. His reply, "Here am I; send me," was dictated by the same principle which

actuated the apostle, when, after, in like manner, seeing the glory of Christ, he exclaimed, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

And the prophet's professed willingness to serve the Lord in any way that might be required was immediately put to the test, inasmuch as he received a commission, the execution of which must have been the most painful of any with which the prophets were at any time charged: "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." The severity of the trial to which the prophet was put, in receiving this commission, did not arise entirely, or even mainly, from the language in which the commission was expressed, as implying that he was actually to be the instrument in shutting the eyes, and hardening the heart, and sealing the impenitency of his countrymen. Similar language was employed in the case of other prophets, when they received their commission; as, for example, when it was said to Jeremiah, "See, I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." Here the prophet is spoken of as himself actually executing, both in the way of judgment and mercy, what he was commanded to foretell; while it is plain that such a mode of speaking was intended simply to express the certainty of the prophet's predictions being fulfilled,—declaring, that whatever he was commanded to say concerning nations and kingdoms should as surely come to pass, as if his word possessed the power of executing its own announcements.

It might thus be said, in a certain sense, that the fate of nations and kingdoms was committed to, or placed in the hands of, Jeremiah. Upon the same principle, then, we are to interpret the commission here given to Isaiah. We are to understand the language, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes," as emphatically expressing the certainty of their remaining impenitent, notwithstanding all that might be said or done to bring them to repentance. But though the same principle of interpretation does thus, to a great

extent, apply to the language of both the commissions referred to, still, that which was given to Isaiah was in some respects a peculiar, and, to him, a very painful one. It was not, as I have already remarked, a commission to foretell merely temporal calamities or national disaster. These, no doubt, were included ; but they were only the consequences of a far more terrible judgment. The prophet was commanded to tell the people that God was about to give them up to a reprobate mind ; that he was to withhold the grace which could alone enlighten their understanding, and savingly impress their heart ; that they should be left to walk in the sight of their own eyes, and to follow the dictates of their own perverted will ; and that they should be overtaken with the most grievous worldly calamities, not in the way of reproof and correction, or for their conversion to God, but as the infliction of the wrath which was to come upon them to the uttermost. The prophet was thus forbidden to entertain any hope that those to whom he was sent, and concerning whom the divine purpose was revealed to him, could at all profit by his warnings or rebuke. His office was to announce the irreversible sentence of the righteous Judge of all. His announcement, therefore, could have no other effect on those whom it concerned than to harden them in impenitency, and so aggravate their guilt ; and thus he might feel as if he really had been commissioned to make their heart fat, and to make their ears heavy, and to shut their eyes.

And that the prophet did feel the solemn nature of the command thus laid upon him is evident from the petition which he preferred, to know what was to be the end or issue of the terrible judgment which he was charged to denounce. He did not, indeed, shrink from the execution of the work to which he had been called. He had been far too deeply impressed with the revelation which had been vouchsafed to him, and with the grace and mercy which he had experienced ; and there had been awakened in his soul a zeal for the glory of him who sat upon the throne, too ardent to be repressed by any thing painful or difficult in the service to which he had been appointed. But there was, evidently, great commiseration awakened in his mind on behalf of those against whom such a terrible sentence had gone forth ; for, on receiving his commission, he said, " Lord,

how long!"—that is, how far, or what is to be the result of all this?—as if he would willingly have said, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?" Nor was the prophet blamed for cherishing or expressing this feeling of compassion. On the contrary, he was not only told what were to be the effects of the hardened impenitence of the people, in bringing upon them temporal judgments, but he was assured also, that, notwithstanding the extent of the coming desolations, provision was made for the due fulfilment of all the divine promises to the Church. To the prophet's question, "Lord, how long?" it was answered, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten."

These last words are understood by some to refer to the faithful remnant of Israel and Judah, who were not included in the sentence passed upon the finally impenitent, and who were, therefore, to prove the seed of the Church, and heirs of all the promises which had been made to the Church from the beginning. Others, however, and on good grounds, I think, consider these words as a continuation of the preceding verses, detailing the calamities which awaited the impenitent; as if it were said, Even if there should be a tenth remaining, and it should return, yet it too shall be eaten, or devoured. But however this may be, the concluding clause of the verse does certainly contain an assurance, that even in what might appear the most hopeless state of things, there should still be a remnant according to the election of grace, and that though the tree should be cut down, and its branches withered, it would, nevertheless, sprout again, and bear fruit. "As a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves, so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof."

To the fulfilment of the prediction in this passage, so far as it was a prediction of judgment, I have already adverted in general terms, and it is not necessary to enter upon the subject again at any great length. The hardened condition of the people here described was very largely exemplified previous to the Babylonish

captivity; and, in the disasters which accompanied and followed that event, the prediction of temporal calamities contained in these verses was also largely fulfilled. But it was to the time at which Christ appeared, and to the events which soon after followed, that the whole passage does more particularly refer; and then the words of the prophecy were fulfilled to the very letter. The men of that generation did, indeed, see and hear what prophets and wise men among their fathers of old desired to see and to hear, but were not permitted. They saw the long-promised and long-expected Messiah, the messenger of the covenant whom the Church delighted in, the desire of all nations. They saw in his person the most unquestionable manifestations of divine wisdom, and power, and compassion. They heard him preach glad tidings to the meek, and proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound, —even the glad tidings of the reign of God. And, after his death and resurrection, they saw still greater things than these, in the signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, which accompanied the ministry of his apostles, and attested the divine authority by which they acted. But seeing, they did not perceive; and hearing, they did not understand. In righteous judgment, God gave them up to the unrestrained government of their own perverted will and alienated affections. They not only rejected Christ, but with wicked hands they crucified and slew the Lord of glory; and they continued to persecute his apostles, and to despise the testimony of the Holy Ghost speaking in them, until wrath came upon them to the uttermost.

But while the judgments here foretold were thus executed, there was a fulfilment also of another prophecy contained in this passage. The vision which the prophet saw, as well as the word which he heard, was prophetic; for it was the glory of Christ that the prophet beheld, and it was of him that he spake. He saw him sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,—in other words, he beheld him in his glorified and exalted state, invested with absolute and universal sovereignty, angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him. It was, moreover, in the temple on mount Zion, the symbol of the Church, that the prophet saw this glorious vision of Christ on his throne,—a very

significant intimation of what is recorded as a matter of fact in the New Testament, namely, that it is for, or on behalf of the Church that Christ has been so exalted: for when it is said that God the Father “raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come;” it is added, in conclusion, and as if to state the great object of all the glory and honour which have been bestowed upon him, “and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” It is farther said of the glorious person whom Isaiah saw, that “his train filled the temple,”—a beautiful symbol of that honour and comeliness which Christ put upon his Church, when, after his exaltation, the Spirit was poured out from on high, not only on the apostles, to qualify them for their great undertaking, but upon all genuine disciples—all true believers—whereby they were made to reflect the glorious image of their Divine Master, so that none could mistake or overlook it. But the glorious person whom the prophet saw was attended by seraphims who waited on him, not only to worship him with profound reverence, covering their faces with their wings, but to proclaim aloud his praise, and to execute his commands. This, too, has been realised in Christ’s exaltation as Mediator; for we have already seen, from the New Testament, that angels, and authorities, and powers, have been made subject to him; and though we do not know much of the manner in which these holy creatures are employed in the economy of grace, yet we know, generally, from the statement of the apostle, that they are all “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.”

But there is another, and, I think, the true interpretation of this part of the prophetic vision. It is that which considers the seraphims as representing the prophets and apostles, by whom, especially, the praises of Christ have been showed forth. The seraphims are here represented as not only ascribing honour and glory to the Lord of hosts, but as announcing also that the earth is full of that glory,—a state of things which the prophets had foretold, and which the apostles were the honoured instruments

of carrying into effect, when they became witnesses for Christ, not in Jerusalem and Judea alone, but in Samaria also, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. The office, too, which the seraphims are here represented as executing, did most strikingly foreshadow that to which the apostles were called. It was one of the seraphims who took a live coal from the altar, and laid it upon the mouth of Isaiah, whereby he was assured that his sin was forgiven him, and by which he was also made to feel that the Holy Spirit had quickened him to new spiritual life, so that he was prepared to do or to endure any thing in the service of the King, the Lord of hosts. And what was this but the very work to which the apostles were called? By the truths which they were taught to preach, the glad tidings which they were commissioned to proclaim, they were the honoured instruments, employed by the Lord himself, to convey to all who truly believed what they preached, the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance with God; and it was through the faith of the same truth that the Holy Spirit sanctified those who believed, and strengthened them for every duty, however self-denying, and for every trial, however severe, whereby they might show forth the praises of Him who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. It were easy to illustrate this part of the subject at greater length, by referring to the history of the primitive Church, as has been largely done by those who interpret the passage as I have now interpreted it. But enough has been stated to show how full of meaning the words of the evangelist are in reference to the prophecy before us, "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory,"—the glory of Christ,—
"and spake of him."

How far the prophet saw and understood the import of the vision which appeared to him, or in what way it was to be realised, we cannot tell. We know that the prophets generally did but partially understand their own predictions respecting Christ; for they "inquired and searched diligently . . . what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow;" and the revelation in the passage before us may have been one of these which the prophet did but imperfectly understand. But to us it has been fully laid open.

The judgments here foretold have been executed, of which the great body of the Jews have, for nearly eighteen hundred years, been witnesses. The symbolical representation of the glory of Christ has also been realised; for he has been exalted at the right hand of God, a Prince and a Saviour,—he has been set King on God's holy hill of Zion,—he has already given many and very unequivocal proofs that he reigns, and must reign till all his enemies are put under his feet; and his dealings with his Church, from the day on which he gave his apostles their commission, till the present hour, afford pledges in abundance that the earth shall be full of his glory.

VI.

“BEHOLD, A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE.”

ISAIAH VII. 14-16.

THE historical narrative with which this chapter commences explains the occasion on which the prophecy contained in the passage before us was delivered. It was in the days of Ahaz, king of Judah, and at the time when his kingdom was invaded by the united armies of Remaliah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria. By this invasion, Ahaz and his people were thrown into great perplexity; for it is here said, that “his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.” We learn, however, from the history of that period, as recorded in the 16th chapter of 2d Kings, and still more fully in the 28th chapter of 2d Chronicles, that Ahaz, instead of seeking help from God, and believing that it would be forthcoming, as he was warranted and commanded to do, formed an alliance with the king of Assyria, trusting that with his help he might be able to repel the assaults of the Syrians and the Israelites. Such an ungodly alliance, it will be remembered, had been frequently and very solemnly forbidden, as most dishonouring and offensive to God,—being nothing less than avowed disbelief of his word, and involving in it a denial of his supremacy. Judah, accordingly, had been often warned that such alliances could terminate only in disappointment and disaster; and often had the warning been verified in their bitter experience.

Ahaz, therefore, in seeking help from Assyria, was about to

bring upon himself and his people certain and far more severe calamities than any that he had to fear, even from the united armies of Syria and Israel; and it was to warn him of this, and to prevent him incurring such guilt and danger, that the prophet was commanded to go forth and meet him. Isaiah, accordingly, did meet the king at the place where he was told he would find him, and said unto him, "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be faint-hearted for the two tails," or the two ends, "of these smoking firebrands;"—implying that, however fiercely they might burn, they were nearly burned out, there being only the ends remaining: be not "faint-hearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah." The prophet then proceeded to assure Ahaz that the confederacy which Syria and Israel had formed for the purpose of dividing the kingdom of Judah, or placing a creature of their own upon the throne, would utterly fail: "Thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin."

We are here left obviously to infer, that the power of Syria was soon to be broken by the destruction of Rezin. And so it was, as we learn from the 16th chapter of 2d Kings, already referred to, where we are told that the king of Assyria, at the request of Ahaz, did go up "against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin." And with regard to Ephraim, or the kingdom of Israel, the prophet also foretold, "Within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people,"—a prediction which began to be and was largely fulfilled by Shalmaneser, and completed by Esarhaddon, who planted heathen in the cities of Samaria. The failure, then, of the confederacy between Israel and Syria to destroy Jerusalem and divide the land, was foretold absolutely and unconditionally, whether Ahaz should hearken to the words of the prophet or no. But he was, at the same time, warned, that if he did not listen to the word of the Lord, and abandon his ungodly purpose of forming an alliance with the king of Assyria, it would ultimately prove the ruin of him and of his people: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

Such was the solemn remonstrance, and the gracious assurance

whereby the prophet sought to turn Ahaz from his guilty course. But, as we learn from the history, it did not succeed; and the prophet would readily perceive that he had made no effectual impression on the mind of the backsliding king. He proceeded, therefore, by divine authority, to put the truth of what he had foretold to a most extraordinary test,—even to any test which Ahaz himself might choose: “Moreover, the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God: ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.” It is evident that Ahaz had manifested some doubt or suspicion whether the prophet had any good ground or authority for asserting what he did; and, in vindication of his prophetic commission, he was commanded to challenge the king to put it to any trial that he chose. To this challenge Ahaz replied, “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.”

At first sight, we might be disposed, perhaps, to conclude that this was an expression of reverence and godly fear,—that Ahaz had been brought to a right mind by the remonstrance and the promises which the prophet had addressed to him, that he now believed these to be the promises of the only living and true God, and that he could not be so presumptuous as to ask a confirmation of what needed not to be confirmed. But, alas! the reply of the prophet, as well as the recorded facts in the history of Ahaz, makes it abundantly evident that his refusal to accept a sign proceeded from very different motives, and from a very different state of mind. It may seem difficult, indeed, to conceive what other feeling but the belief of what the prophet foretold, and reverence for God, could have dictated the reply, “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.” But there is enough in his character, I think, as that appears in the history of his reign, to explain his conduct on the occasion here referred to. It was this Ahaz, it will be remembered, of whom it is said, that “he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire.” It was he who, on seeing an idolatrous altar at Damascus, sent the fashion and the pattern of it to Urijah, the priest, who built one after that pattern, and put it into the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, in the place of that which Solomon had erected there. It was this Ahaz who “sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus which smote him,” saying,

"Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me," though "they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel." And, finally, it was this Ahaz who persevered in his ungodly course, till at last he "shut up the doors of the house of the Lord," and "made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem."

It is plain, from all this, that Ahaz had thoroughly adopted the views and opinions which prevailed in the heathen world generally,—namely, that the gods of the different nations were all of them gods possessing power, some, perhaps, in a greater degree than others, but still possessing power to protect those who served them, and, in many cases, to punish those who despised them. In fact, Ahaz plainly declared that this was his opinion, when he said, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me." Though he had, therefore, disowned the great fundamental truth which Israel had been raised up to assert and maintain,—namely, the supremacy of the God of Israel, as the only living and true God,—yet he might still acknowledge, and, in some sense, believe, that he was a god, but only one of many, and that it might be his interest to propitiate some of these other gods, as well as the God of his own land. It appears however, that for a while, at least, he did not utterly relinquish the worship of the God of Israel; for, with all his idolatry, he still kept the house of the Lord open. But as his difficulties and his disasters multiplied,—the consequence of forsaking the Lord God of his fathers,—his confidence in the God of Israel would diminish, and his zeal in the worship of other gods would increase,—concluding, as he would do, that the God of his own land was either unwilling or unable to defend him. And the natural termination of such a course, if he was not brought to true repentance, would be what we find it actually was. He at last shut up the doors of the house of the Lord altogether.

Such, then, being the views and character of Ahaz, we can easily see how it was that he was unwilling to accept the offer of a sign which the prophet made to him. If he had accepted the offer, and proposed a sign to confirm the truth and divine authority of what Isaiah had predicted, he would thereby have pledged himself to abide by the result of the trial,—that is to

say, he would have been bound, if the sign had actually been given, to give up his purpose of forming an alliance with the king of Assyria, and to cast himself unreservedly on the protection of the Lord God of Israel. His accepting the offer of a sign would certainly have pledged him to this course, in the opinion of his court, and of the multitude around him; and if a sign of his own choosing had been exhibited before so many witnesses, he could not either with honour or safety have refused to follow the course which the prophet prescribed. But he was not prepared to do so; or rather, his mind was made up to follow the opposite course. Though he still believed that the Lord, that is, Jehovah,—the God of Israel,—was a God; he could not confide in him,—he durst not trust him,—as the only living and true God. He wished also to propitiate the gods of the Assyrians; and having resolved, therefore, to follow out his original purpose of calling the Assyrians to his aid, he was unwilling to listen to any argument, and afraid to witness any sign, which was calculated to shake that purpose. He was in a state of mind, which, I suspect, is no uncommon one,—that of a man who is determined to follow a line of conduct, regarding the lawfulness of which he has some secret misgivings, but in favour of which all his passions and worldly interests plead. Such a man will listen with great eagerness to any thing which goes to justify the course which he has secretly resolved to follow,—an eagerness which shows that his conscience needed something to lighten the burden that lay upon it. But he will hear with impatience, if, indeed, he will hear at all, any argument that would go to prove that his purpose is unlawful, and must end in disappointment. So it was with Ahaz. He was afraid that if he asked the sign, and it came to pass, he would be obliged to do as the prophet bade him; and, therefore, with some secret hope, perhaps, that he might still obtain any help which the God of Israel could give him, while he made sure of the more efficient aid of the gods of the Assyrians, he assumed a tone of respect or reverence for Jehovah, and replied to the prophet's proposal, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord."

I need hardly observe, that if such were the views and feelings of Ahaz, he was chargeable with the guilt of placing the God of Israel on a level with the false gods of the heathen,—

may, of assigning to him a lower and less honourable place than that which he assigned to the others. And that such was the sin with which Ahaz was chargeable, is confirmed not only by the facts in his history to which I have already referred, but by the answer which Isaiah returned to his hypocritical pretence of not wishing to tempt the Lord. The prophet saw through his impious but flimsy disguise; and he tore it away. He could bear to be himself doubted and suspected by the king, as one who had without a sufficient warrant assumed the character and office of a prophet; but he could not bear that the God whom he served should be openly insulted by the rejection of the offer which, with unexampled condescension, he had made of a sign whereby to vindicate the character, and attest the divine authority of his servant. He broke forth, therefore, in the language of holy indignation, saying, "Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?"

The prophet, it will be observed, does not name Ahaz in this reply. He addresses him and his as the house of David,—a very emphatic and bitter rebuke,—reminding the king how widely he had departed from the ways of him whose family he represented, and whose throne he occupied. And then he warns the king not to flatter himself, that, in rejecting the offered sign, he was merely despising the prophet, a man like himself, but that he was despising Jehovah, the Lord of hosts, the only true God; and that though he refused the gracious offer, those of his people who were still faithful to their covenant engagements were not, therefore, to lose the benefit of the divine condescension and kindness. "Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men?"—that is, to doubt and distrust the prophets, on the pretext that they speak without authority; "but will ye weary my God also?"—that is, will ye refuse to accept evidence, and evidence, too, of your own choosing, whereby he is willing to attest the character of these prophets, and confirm the truth of what they predict? "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

The meaning of this prediction has been settled by an in-

spired commentator, who has told us that Immanuel is Christ, and who has, moreover, explained the significant import of that name; for the evangelist Matthew, after recording the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus, proceeds to say: "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." It is thus placed beyond all doubt, by the testimony of the Holy Spirit himself, that the prediction in the passage under consideration refers to Christ; and, moreover, that it contained a new and a very large addition to what had previously been revealed of the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. According to the evangelist's commentary, Christ was here set forth in his divine and human nature. It was not a mere interposition of divine power that was here foretold, such as frequently took place on behalf of Israel, and in which it might be said, God is with us. The subject of the prophecy is a person,—and one miraculously born; and the expression, "God with us," is a name or title of that person, and, therefore, descriptive of him, as uniting in himself the divine and human natures.

This, then, was the sign, or token, or pledge which God condescended to give, that the kings of Israel and Syria would assuredly fail in the conspiracy which they had formed to subjugate Jerusalem and Judah, and to place a stranger on the throne of David. It could be no sure sign, indeed, to Ahaz, or to any who, like him, had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers, esteeming him not more, or rather as less worthy of their fear and confidence, than the false gods of the heathen. Ahaz plainly declared that he would not have been persuaded to withdraw his confidence from these false gods, and to place it in Jehovah alone, even if he had witnessed the most stupendous sign immediately addressed to his senses, and a sign, too, of his own choosing; and how much less, then, would he be moved by the prediction of an event which was still at an indefinite and a very great distance? But this is only a farther proof how far Ahaz had gone in his apostasy; for if he did not see a sign in the prophet's prediction, it must have been because he had for-

gotten, or ceased to believe the promise of a great deliverer who had been foretold from the beginning,—that promise, the renewal of which from time to time had sustained the faith and revived the hope of the Church through many generations. Ahaz ought to have recognised, in the prophet's prediction, the repetition, in a still more definite form, of the first promise of the Saviour, wherein he was emphatically called "the Seed of the woman." And, farther, he ought to have known and remembered that the fulfilment of this promise had been restricted to the royal house of David,—that is, to the house of Ahaz himself, he being the heir, and, at that moment, the possessor of David's throne. And if he had believed this, he must have seen that the purpose of the kings of Israel and Syria could not stand, inasmuch as the throne of David could not be transferred to a stranger, till a virgin should have conceived and borne a son.

But the sign which the prophet was instructed to give could not profit unbelievers. In regard to them, so long as they continued in unbelief, it could only aggravate their guilt, and leave them without excuse. And so it must have been with Ahaz. If he continued impenitent, it would be found at last that he had rejected Christ, inasmuch as he rejected, as unworthy of credit, all those predictions and promises concerning Christ, by the faith of which Old Testament saints were justified or found acceptance with God. In regard, then, to Ahaz and his unbelieving people, unless they were brought to repentance, the language of the prophet was the language of condemnation, when he said, "Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

But while this prediction had nothing in it of a sign that could influence Ahaz, and nothing of precious truth that could profit him, it was to the faithful few, the true covenant people of God, for whom it was mainly intended, a sure sign or pledge of their deliverance from the calamities which then threatened them, just because it contained the one great and precious truth which was the source of all their consolation and hope.

They believed in the promise of a Saviour, the Seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent's head; and to the fulfilment of this promise they were eagerly looking forward. The promise, then, was here renewed to them, and not merely renewed, but expressed in terms more full, and clear, and definite, than had been previously employed; and in connection, moreover, with the assurance which the prophet had just given to Ahaz, that the expedition of the armies of Israel and Syria against Jerusalem would utterly fail. It was virtually saying, then, that as certainly as a virgin should one day conceive and bear a son, so certainly would Jerusalem and Judah be delivered from the dangers which then threatened them; and thus the birth of Immanuel was a sign or pledge to them that they would be so delivered.

But how, it may be asked, could the more distant event of Immanuel's birth be a sign of the accomplishment of a nearer event,—namely, the deliverance of Judah from her invaders? So, no doubt, Ahaz might have been disposed to argue; and so may unbelievers still. But the sign was not intended for unbelievers. Ahaz had refused to ask the sort of sign which was fitted to silence or to convict ungodly cavillers; and the sign which was given was for the comfort and encouragement of God's people. And to them it was a sign similar to that which was given to Moses, to overcome his reluctance to undertake the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, when it was said to him out of the bush, "Certainly I will be with thee: and this shall be a token unto thee that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain." An unbeliever might have alleged that this event,—namely, worshipping God on that mountain, which was not to take place till after Moses had succeeded in his enterprise,—could be no token beforehand that God had sent him, and that he would be successful. But it was such a token as it was befitting God to give, and as it became his servant to receive, as a special mark of the divine condescension; inasmuch as it was an assurance that the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt depended on no condition or contingency by which it might be defeated, but was absolutely and infallibly secured. And, in like manner, the deliverance of Jerusalem and Judah from the invasion of Israel and Syria, was here expressly connected with or bound up

in the promise of Messiah,—that promise which believers in Judah felt to be the surest and most stable of all things,—that on which they rested their all for time and for eternity. In this sense, then, the prediction of the prophet was a very sure and a very precious sign to the faithful remnant in Jerusalem and Judah.

But there were other circumstances connected with that prediction, which gave to it still more of the character of a sign, or token, in the ordinary acceptation of the word. I have already had occasion to remark, that Ahaz himself ought to have seen, in the event which the prophet foretold, a sure pledge that the deliverance promised would take place; for if he had believed that Messiah was to be born, and, moreover, that he was to be born of the house of David, he must have concluded that Israel and Syria could not succeed in their plot against the throne of Judah. But though Ahaz was blind to all this, the people of God would see it clearly; and, for their farther confirmation and comfort, the prophet proceeded to limit, not very definitely indeed, but still to limit the period within which the enemies of Judah should suffer a grievous overthrow: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey"—or, milk and honey—"shall he eat, that he may know"—or, until he know—"to refuse the evil, and choose the good."

The simple meaning of these words I take to be, that the wonderful child whose birth the prophet had foretold was to grow up and fare as other children were wont to do,—a statement which implies, that though he was God, yet he was also man, being in all things "made like unto his brethren." But, with a more special reference to the occasion on which this prediction was delivered, it is added, "For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings."

To understand this, and its application to the purpose for which it was obviously designed,—that of comforting the Church in Isaiah's time,—it is necessary to bear in mind, that, in the visions which were presented to the prophet, future things appeared as if they were present, so that the prophet felt and spoke of them as if they had been so. That this was the condition of the prophets while under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost,

and while contemplating the visions that were presented to them, appears from various considerations furnished by Scripture; and the recollection of this circumstance will throw great light on many passages of the prophetic writings. With regard to the case before us, the prophet saw the birth of Immanuel, which he had foretold, as if it had already taken place; and speaking of it, therefore, as a present thing, as an event which had just happened, he dates from it the period within which Israel and Syria were to suffer a great overthrow: "Before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest,"—the land that hath made thee sick with terror and perplexity,—that is, Israel and Syria, spoken of as one land, because they were united against Judah,—“the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.” The period thus specified, namely, that which elapses between the birth of a child, and the time at which the child becomes capable of refusing the evil, and choosing the good, is not a very definite or precise period. But commentators are generally agreed that it denotes something like three years; and history testifies that within that period Syria was overthrown, as we have already seen, and Ephraim, or Israel, began largely to experience those calamities which terminated in its being broken, and ceasing to be a people.

The prediction in the passage under consideration, besides the special purpose which it was designed to serve, inculcates a general truth, which is as interesting and instructive to the Church still as at the period when the prediction was delivered. The very selection, indeed, of the birth of Messiah, as a sign whereby to confirm the faith of the people of God, seems plainly to intimate, that it was intended to serve purposes far more extensive than merely to assure the faithful remnant of Isaiah's time, that they should be delivered from the temporal calamities which then threatened them. Many other signs might have accomplished that object, if so it had seemed meet unto God. But the one selected was fraught with the most important instruction, and with inexhaustible consolation to the Church, not of that time only, but of all subsequent times. It plainly intimated that all the deliverances which had been or were yet to be wrought on behalf of the Church, were by or for the sake of Him whose birth was foretold by the prophet. This, indeed, was implied in

the very first promise of a Saviour; for it was on the ground of that promise alone that there ever could be a Church,—that is, a people called out from among the fallen children of men, to be rescued from the power of the serpent,—the wicked one,—who had seduced them into sin, and so brought them under condemnation,—even as the captives of the mighty taken away, and the prey of the terrible delivered.

It was the Seed of the woman who was thus to bruise the head, or crush the power of the serpent; and many intimations were subsequently given of this great truth, by the actual appearance, in human form, of the Deliverer thus promised, according to the circumstances and necessities of the Church. And this great fundamental and original truth was very emphatically expressed again by the prophet on the occasion before us. He told the Church,—the true covenant people of God of that time,—that their deliverance from the dangers which threatened them was not only as certain as was the appearance of the child whose birth he foretold, but that it was by and for the sake of that child that they were to be delivered. All this was obviously implied in the predictions; for unless the believing people to whom it was addressed, and whom it was obviously designed to comfort, had been interested in the great deliverance announced in the first promise,—namely, deliverance from the power of the serpent, and from the condemnation under which he had brought them,—there would have been nothing appropriate, and nothing consoling, in the sign which was given to them of their deliverance from Israel and Syria,—namely, the birth of him who was foretold in the first promise as the Seed of the woman. But they were assured that if they held fast their confidence in the promise to which they had been clinging, and in which they had already found peace and comfort, they should assuredly participate in all the blessings that Messiah had to bestow, and that no combination of worldly power, or any number of worldly enemies, could ever deprive them of these blessings.

And what have all subsequent revelations from God been, but clearer statements and new confirmations of the same precious truth,—namely, that all events are overruled and determined by him who was here foretold, and that, too, for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes regarding his Church, his redeemed

people? We have seen the fulfilment of the prophet's prediction. A virgin has conceived and borne a child. That child has been demonstrated to be Immanuel, God with us, even God manifest in the flesh, in very deed dwelling with men on the earth. He grew up, moreover, from infancy to manhood, as children are wont to grow. He died, too, that by his death "he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." In testimony of his thus having bruised the head of the serpent, he rose again from the dead, and ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, and receiving gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them. He is now at the right hand of God, exalted "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named." And it has been given to him "to be the head over all things to the Church;"—in other words, he is invested, as Mediator, with sovereign authority and power, to direct and determine all events on behalf and for the sake of his Church.

If the people of God, then, in Isaiah's time, were comforted, and refreshed in spirit, and made to rejoice in a sense of the divine protection, as we cannot doubt they were, by the announcement of the birth of the wonderful child Immanuel,—though they must have had but very imperfect views of the manner in which he was to fulfil the first promise,—with what fulness of joy may not believers in these last days be filled, now that they have witnessed the accomplishment of all that was foretold and promised, and can look up to Immanuel at God's right hand, King of Zion, and King of nations! It is true, indeed, that Christ does not promise his people now, for their comfort and encouragement, such deliverances as Isaiah was commissioned to announce to the Church of his time. But can believers grudge the Old Testament saints the temporal blessings which they received, and the temporal deliverances which they experienced, when it is remembered how much they stood in need of outward, sensible, and palpable tokens of the divine favour, while they possessed but a very scanty measure of revelation, compared with what has been vouchsafed to the Church in these last days? Even in regard to present temporal calamities, Christ has given to his people an assurance unspeakably more precious than even a promise of deliverance from these calamities. He has assured them

that they will work together for their good, as well as for his glory.

And what more would they have? Though days of tribulation should overtake them,—though Syria and Ephraim should be confederate against them, saying, “Let us go up against Judah, and vex it,”—though the heathen should rage, “and the people imagine a vain thing,”—and though “the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed;”—yet believers, who cleave to Christ, may possess their souls in patience, knowing not only that their own spiritual interests are safe, but that the interests of the Redeemer’s kingdom will be advanced, amidst all the turbulence and turmoil whereby ungodly men may seek to overthrow that kingdom. Against these calamities, God’s people have no promise of protection, in so far as worldly comfort, or even life itself, is concerned. They have, however, a promise that they shall be kept from falling away from the faith and the hope of the gospel; and the promise, also, that all these things shall contribute to the advancement of the Redeemer’s cause.

VII.

THE TITLES OF CHRIST.

ISAIAH IX. 6, 7.

IN the preceding chapter, at the 14th verse, the prophet had foretold, that at some future period the Lord should be “for a sanctuary,”—that is, to those who should confide in and cleave to him,—but that he should also be for “a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence, to both the houses of Israel; for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem;” and that “many among them” should “stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.” This prediction is referred to in various passages of the New Testament as a prediction of Christ; and it was literally fulfilled in him, inasmuch as, when he appeared, he was a sanctuary,—a refuge and a resting-place to as many as believed in him; while, to both the houses of Israel,—that is, to the Jews generally,—he was, indeed, a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. “But Israel,” says the apostle, “which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” This general, or rather almost universal, unbelief on the part of the Jews, the prophet sets forth, in the concluding verses of the 8th chapter, under the figure of darkness, including in that figure not only

their want of spiritual light and discernment to know the Lord, but also the bitter consequences of their blindness : " To the law and to the testimony : if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. And they shall pass through it hardly bestead and hungry ; . . . they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward. And they shall look unto the earth ; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish ; and they shall be driven to darkness."

But in the midst of this darkness which the prophet foretold was to cover the people, he beheld in prophetic vision, as if actually present, a glorious light shining, and shining, too, on what had always been the darkest portion of the land of Israel, even " the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali," the land " by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations," or Gentiles. The district of country thus described had always been a vexed and a degraded district. From its position as forming the northern extremity of Canaan, and, therefore, contiguous to the heathen nations in that quarter, it lay more open to the inroads of these nations ; and, accordingly, in the case of foreign invasions, as they suffered first, so they frequently suffered more severely than the rest of the land of Israel. But, from various causes, it was also looked upon, and not without reason, as a morally degraded district. From its neighbourhood to the heathen, its inhabitants were, of course, exposed to the debasing influence of idolatry, with the abominations of which they must have been familiar. And if the rest of Israel, who were placed in more favourable circumstances, were so prone to fall into idolatry, what was to be expected of the Galileans, who were continually coming into contact with their idolatrous neighbours ? But, besides this, we are told that Solomon gave to Hiram, king of Tyre, twenty cities in the land of Galilee ; so that, from a very early period, the Galileans had multitudes of the heathen dwelling in the midst of them,—and heathens, too, as appears from various parts of Scripture, of the most corrupt and debased character. And while circumstances thus contributed to the debasement of the inhabitants of that district, their distance from Jerusalem, where, even in the worst times, something of the true religion lingered, and where the occasional revival of better times usually began,—I say, their distance from Jerusalem placed

them beyond the reach of that influence which might have arrested their downward course to idolatry, or which might have revived the true religion when it was about to expire. Accordingly, we find the prophet, in the passage before us, calling that district "Galilee of the Gentiles,"—not because it bordered on the Gentiles or heathen nations, but because it was Gentile or heathen in its character. And such its character continued to be down to the time of our Lord's appearing, even in the estimation of the most devout men of Israel; for when the honest, the guileless Nathanael was told by Philip that the promised Messiah had appeared in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, a city of Galilee, he replied, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

It was here, then, in this long-vexed and degraded portion of the land, that the prophet beheld in vision a glorious light arising amidst the thick darkness which covered the whole of Israel. "The people," says he, speaking of it as if actually present to his view, "the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." And there, accordingly, in the fulness of time, did the Sun of Righteousness arise in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. As if to intimate,—nay, for the very purpose, I doubt not, of intimating,—even from the first, that he had come to save the chief of sinners, to proclaim salvation to the veriest outcasts, the most degraded of the children of men, Christ did especially show himself, and manifest forth his glory in Galilee. It was there that he grew up from infancy to manhood. There, even in Capernaum, within the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali, he fixed his ordinary place of abode, during no small portion of his personal ministry. That ministry was, of course, chiefly exercised in Galilee; and there he performed very many of his miracles. His disciples, too, were chiefly selected from among the inhabitants of the same district; and it appears that in Galilee was to be found the greatest number of his most sincere and devoted followers. In all this, then, we might, without difficulty, and with great certainty, discover the fulfilment of the prediction before us, though we had nothing else to guide us but the facts recorded in the gospel history. But we have the express testimony of the evangelist Matthew on the subject, who tells us that Jesus

“came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea-coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.”

Everybody who is at all acquainted with Scripture will recollect that light is employed to denote prosperity, whether temporal or spiritual,—or, in other words, that light denotes the best and richest blessings which God has to bestow. Christ called himself the light of the world. The prophet, then, having foretold generally, under the name of light, the blessings which were to be conferred on the people of Galilee, and ultimately to be extended to all nations, proceeds, in the third and two following verses, to set forth more particularly the nature of these blessings, representing them as a great increase of the people,—that is, of the true covenant people of God,—their deliverance from the power and oppression of their enemies, and the final establishment of universal peace: “Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy;” or, as it may be rendered, “Thou hast multiplied the nation to whom thou hadst not increased the joy,”—that is, who were formerly vexed and oppressed: “they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian,”—that is, as in the day when Gideon overthrew the mighty hosts of the Midianites,—intimating that the deliverance which the prophet here foretold was to be accomplished, not by might nor by power of man, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. “For,” adds the prophet, in the 5th verse, “For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning,” or for burning, “and fuel of fire,”—that is, all ensigns and implements of war shall be made food for fire, or shall be utterly consumed.

This, it is plain, is a glorious description of the rise, progress, and final establishment of Christ’s kingdom,—all which was presented at once in prophetic vision to Isaiah’s mind, together with Christ himself, in all the glory both of his humiliation and

exaltation. And, accordingly, the prophet proceeds, in the passage under consideration, to set forth Christ personally, and then those attributes and qualities of Christ which might give assurance to the Church that he was able to achieve all the great and glorious things which are here foretold: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

In the first place, then, the prophet sets forth the person of Christ as one of the grounds of that confidence and joy which he had already foretold were to fill the hearts of God's people: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." We should naturally conclude, I think, from the language of these verses, that Christ is here presented to us in both his divine and human nature. That he is spoken of in his human nature when it is said, "unto us a child is born," is abundantly obvious; and unless we suppose that the next clause, "unto us a son is given," is merely a repetition of the former, and a repetition having no peculiar force or significance, we must conclude that the son given means the son of him who gives,—that is, the Son of God, or Christ in his divine nature. This interpretation, too, is in accordance with this same prophet's manner of speaking concerning Christ in a preceding chapter, where he says, "A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," or "God with us,"—a prediction which the evangelist Matthew says was fulfilled in the miraculous birth of Jesus. And in the New Testament, we find what, I think, are obvious allusions to the prediction in these verses, at one time in connection with the human nature of Christ, and at another in reference to his divine nature. Thus, we are told by the evangelist Luke, that the birth of Christ was announced by an angel to certain shepherds, who were watching their flocks by night on the plains of Bethlehem, and that he announced it in these words, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all

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people. For unto you is born,—*for unto you is born*,—this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” The allusion in these words to the prediction in the passage under consideration is too obvious to be mistaken. Both passages announce the same event,—the birth of a child. Both announcements are expressed in the same language,—“unto us,” the prophet says,—“unto you,” the angel says,—is born “a child,—a Saviour.” And the object of the announcement in both cases is the same,—namely, that of filling the hearts of God’s people with joy and gladness. “They joy before thee,” says the prophet, “according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil; . . . for unto us a child is born.” “Behold,” says the angel, “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born . . . a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

In like manner, we find the second clause of the verse, “Unto us a son is given,” obviously alluded to in the New Testament in reference to the divine nature of Christ. In the gospel by John, it is recorded of our Lord that in his interview with Nicodemus, he thus spoke of himself, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Elsewhere we find him speaking of himself as given or sent to men by the Father; as when he says, in the 6th chapter of John’s gospel, where he calls himself “the bread of life,” “Verily, verily, I say unto you, . . . my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.” And the apostle, in the 8th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans,—that wonderful chapter, which was especially designed to fill the hearts of God’s people with joy and peace in believing,—represents God’s gift of his own Son as the chief ground of the joy, and hope, and peace of believers: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered” or gave “him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” The clause of the verse, then, which we are now considering, contains in one short sentence the substance of what is more fully unfolded in the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ, as born of a woman, and given or sent from heaven,—as God and man in one person,—as the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. And that this view of the person of Christ lies

at the foundation of all the peace, and consolation, and good hope which believers enjoy, is a matter of experience with them. They know that when awakened to some right apprehension of the value of their souls, and when under a deep sense of their helplessness, as well as their misery, they were ready to cry out, "What shall I do to be saved?" it would not have been sufficient for pacifying their conscience, and for giving them a solid ground of hope, to be assured that, if they believed or trusted in Christ, they should be saved, unless they were also assured that Christ is a divine person, even the Lord from heaven, and, therefore, able to accomplish whatever he is pleased to undertake. The salvation of the soul, to those who are really in earnest on the subject, is infinitely too momentous to be intrusted to any one who is not divine, and of whom they could not say, as the apostle did, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

And, in like manner, believers know from experience that it is necessary for the fulness of their joy and consolation to be assured that Christ is man; not only because he could not otherwise have suffered what was needful to be endured for the expiation of their guilt, but also because his partaking of their nature gives them a sure pledge of his tender sympathy in all their afflictions. Yes, it is to them a very precious truth, that He who was "the ancient of days" became a little child,—that he grew from infancy to manhood,—that at every successive stage of life, he participated in all the ills incident to humanity, in so far as its sinless infirmities could subject him to these ills,—that this world was to him, in an unspeakably greater degree than it ever can be even to the most afflicted of his people, a world of toil and sore travail,—and that his weary pilgrimage terminated at last in his laying down his life for their sakes. It is in this truth that they see Christ made in all things like unto them, "that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God;" and it is in meditating on this truth that they feel assured, that they have not an high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of their infirmities, but that, himself having suffered temptation, he is also "able to succour them that are tempted." It is in Christ, then, as God and man

in one person, that believers see the ground of their joy and peace; and were they asked a reason of the hope that is in them, they might reply, in the words of the prophet, We rejoice, "for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given."

But, in the second place, the prophet sets forth the office of Christ as a farther ground of the joy that was to fill the hearts of God's people in the latter day: "And the government shall be upon his shoulder." Some have supposed that government is here represented as being on the shoulder, for the purpose of intimating that it is a weight or burden, which can only be sustained by one who is mighty; and if so, it does also intimate that He of whom the prophet speaks did possess the adequate might or strength. Others, however, consider the expression as referring to the custom of eastern kings wearing on their shoulders a cloak or mantle, of a particular kind, as a badge of royalty, —an ensign of supreme or sovereign authority; and as intimating, therefore, that the person whom the prophet foretold would be manifested as a King, and would exhibit proofs or credentials of his right to rule. But whatever may be the precise import of the figure, "the government" here spoken of seems to be absolute and unlimited. It is called "the government," without any qualification or restriction; and, therefore, we would naturally conclude that it means universal government,—even that of a sovereign ruler, in heaven above, and on the earth beneath. But we would as naturally conclude, from the connection in which this government is here spoken of, that it was to be exercised or conducted with a special reference to the Church, the true covenant people of God. It is in their name that the prophet speaks, when he says, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." When he immediately adds, therefore, "and the government shall be upon his shoulder," he plainly intimates that the glorious person whom he beheld in vision was to rule in an especial manner for their behoof. It was as the child born unto them, as the son given unto them, that he was to be invested with supreme authority; and, therefore, we must conclude, first, that his government was to be universal; and, secondly, that it was to be conducted with a direct and immediate reference to the interests of the Church. And we have only to turn to the New Testament to see, not merely how fully these conclusions are

borne out, but how, in a single sentence, the prophet has here stated the substance of what the New Testament testifies concerning the ground of Christ's exaltation,—the nature of the government which is upon his shoulder, and the purposes for which he conducts or carries on that government. It is there frequently and very plainly declared, that it is as Mediator, as God and man in one person,—as the child that was born, the son that was given,—that he has been raised to glory and to honour. The apostle expressly declares, that because Jesus Christ “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, . . . humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;” therefore, “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.”

But I need not quote passages which will crowd on the recollection of every one who is at all acquainted with the Scriptures. Wherever Christ's exaltation to honour, and glory, and government is spoken of in the New Testament, it is spoken of him as God-man,—the character in which he is set forth in the passage before us. And equally explicit are the declarations of the New Testament respecting the nature and extent of the government with which Christ has been invested. It is, as the prophet foretold, universal government,—a government absolute and unlimited,—a sovereignty over all creatures, in heaven, and earth, and hell. Repeatedly do we find our Lord saying so of himself, “All things are delivered unto me of my Father,”—“The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand,”—“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” And, in the passage already referred to, where the apostle states the ground or reason of Christ's exaltation, there is also a statement of the absolute and unlimited authority with which Christ has been invested: “God hath . . . given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” But here, as in the former case, it were endless to quote the passages which confirm the conclusion drawn from the verses we are considering, regarding

the universality and unlimited nature of Christ's authority. Wherever his mediatorial government is referred to or spoken of, something is said which implies that it is supreme. And, finally, the New Testament does as explicitly testify that this government, this supreme authority with which he is invested, is exercised with an immediate reference to the Church, his redeemed people, and specially with a view to their best interests. This is very plainly intimated in the passages to which I have already referred.

But there are others in which this precious truth is still more expressly stated. Our Lord himself declared to his disciples, that as the Father had given him a kingdom, so he would appoint unto them to eat and drink at his table in his kingdom, and to sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. He assured them for their consolation and encouragement, in the prospect of his leaving them, that he went for the purpose of preparing a place for them; and if he went to prepare a place for them, he would come again, and receive them to himself, that where he is there they may be also. And the apostle Paul, in one of the sublimest passages of his writings, where he sets forth the glory of Christ's exaltation to the throne of universal dominion, expressly declares that it is to or for the benefit of the Church that Christ has been exalted. The Father, he says, raised Christ "from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." When the prophet, then, beheld in vision Christ in his exaltation, invested with such a government, and for such purposes, had he not reason to say of those who should be the subjects of that government, of those who should participate in the mighty deliverance wrought out by their King, "They shall joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil?"

And is it so with all who profess to be the subjects of Christ's kingdom? Is it always so even with those who really are his subjects? Do all of them always realise Christ's exaltation to uni-

versal dominion, and rejoice therein as that which imparts to them a sense of safety, a feeling of security, a consciousness of strength amidst all the turmoil, the temptations, the changes, and the conflicts of this state of sin, disorder, and suffering? Alas! I fear not. Mere nominal professors cannot rejoice in realising the Saviour's exaltation to sovereign authority; for no doctrine is more offensive to the natural man than that which teaches that the government of this world,—the determination of all events which concern individuals, and communities, and kingdoms,—is in the hand of Jesus Christ as Mediator, as God and man in one person. Such men will bear to hear, and they will sometimes vaguely speak of God and providence; but they cannot bear to realise the personality of the sovereign ruler of the world in the man Christ Jesus, for that would force them into a state of too great nearness to God. But I fear that even they to whom the doctrine of Christ's exaltation to universal dominion is a very precious doctrine, and who rejoice in it as often as they can realise it, are not always careful to do so. For if they did, might they not always be ready to adopt the language of the prophet, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet we will rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of our salvation,"—"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government is upon his shoulder."

But, in the third place, the prophet sets forth the qualities or attributes of the promised deliverer, as if to assure the Church that he was able to conduct the government which was to be upon his shoulder; and that, therefore, they might confide and glory in him: "And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." It could not fail to minister largely to the faith, and hope, and comfort of the Church in Isaiah's time, to be assured that names or titles like these could be applied to the King whom he foretold; for it was an assurance that though he was to appear as a child, in all the helplessness of infancy, he was, nevertheless, a divine person, possessing the divine attributes of infinite wisdom, and might, and power. And the first title which is

here given to him was not unknown to the Church, even before Isaiah's time, as denoting the presence and interposition of a divine person. Thus, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife, and when Manoah asked him, saying, "What is thy name?" the angel said unto him, "Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" or wonderful. And, in like manner, when Jacob asked the angel who had wrestled with him, saying, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name; he said unto him, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?"—no doubt, for the same reason, though it is not mentioned, because it was secret, or wonderful. But to whatever extent the Old Testament Church might understand the names and titles here enumerated, their significancy and appropriateness, as applied to Christ, are very obvious to us now. In every view that we can take of Christ,—in his birth, in his life, in the miracles which he wrought, and in the mysterious sufferings which he endured,—he was indeed "Wonderful."

But the title is especially applicable to him as the Son of God, the second person of the Godhead, the eternal Word, who was "in the beginning," who was "with God," and who was "God;" and of whom it is said in the book of Revelation, "He had a name written, that no man knew but he himself, . . . and his name is called the Word of God." And still more significantly, in our apprehension of things, is this title given to him when we contemplate him as the Word made flesh, and dwelling among us, so that they who have spiritual discernment behold his glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father;" for he was, indeed, the brightness of the Father's glory, "and the express image of his person." It is thus that two inspired writers speak of Christ,—one of them, the beloved disciple who leant upon his breast, and who was employed to ask him what none of his fellow-disciples could venture to ask; the other, a disciple and an apostle also, though as one born out of due time, but who also saw Christ, and who received from his own mouth the assurance that he was one of his chosen vessels to carry the precious treasure of the gospel. But mark with what reverence and holy awe they speak of Christ! They use no language of familiarity, such as in later times has sometimes been used by the professed followers of Christ. They did not forget, and they have admo-

nished all who came after them not to forget in thinking and speaking of Christ that his name is, The "Wonderful."

But the other titles here given to Christ are equally significant and instructive: "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor." Christ is emphatically the Counsellor of his Church. He is the prophet of his people, to whom they are indebted for the knowledge of all that is worth knowing to sinful, guilty, perishing sinners; for he has told them, and he only could tell them, how they may be saved. He was manifested for this purpose. As the Word of God he was made flesh, to give utterance to the counsel and will of God for the salvation of sinners. He did so from the beginning; for every revelation of grace and mercy came through him. His language from the beginning has been, "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live." From the beginning, also, he has had reason to complain, and say, "I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof." So he complained in the days of his humiliation, when, in sorrow and sadness, he said to the unbelieving Jews, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life,"—"I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive."

Yet, notwithstanding all this, he is still, even in his exalted and glorified state, entreating sinners to listen to him as their counsellor, who alone can tell them all that it is needful for them to know; for his language is, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." Believers know, and will thankfully acknowledge, that it is by listening to this counsel that they have found peace, and have been made partakers of everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. Oh, that they were always equally ready to listen to him, when he counsels them to have the same mind in them which was also in him! For why is it that they are so often in perplexity and trouble? why is it that they meet with so much that frets, and disturbs, and renders them unhappy? why do they so often find the plainest duties to be difficult and pain-

ful? It is because of their remaining pride, and worldliness, and self-seeking. And in how many instances would all their fretfulness be soothed, and all their difficulties be removed, did they but listen to their divine Counsellor, when he says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

And how comes it that this divine Counsellor, or revealer of God's will, has such a gracious communication to make? How is it that he has power or authority to tell poor, guilty, perishing sinners, that they may be saved? On what ground is it that he can give to them the assurance of pardon, and sanctification, and eternal life? The next title here given him by the prophet answers this question. He is "The Mighty God." This title does not merely assert that he is a divine person,—God. It also implies that he was to accomplish a work of might, which none but God could accomplish; and the New Testament bears witness that he has done so. He undertook to bruise the serpent's head,—to deliver the prey out of the hand of the terrible,—to destroy the work of the devil. This was an undertaking which God alone could accomplish; yet it had been an easy work, if there had been nothing more than the combined strength of earth and hell to encounter. But it was not a mere act of power that he was required to put forth. It was not merely that he had to come forth against the strong man, who held sinners under the bondage of condemnation and corruption, and prove himself to be the stronger man,—that had been an easy work; but he had to conflict with what was infinitely more terrible than all the powers of earth and hell. He had to conflict with divine justice, demanding satisfaction for the guilty violation of the divine law. He did so, not to soften down or compromise its demands,—that was impossible,—but to satisfy these demands to the uttermost. Heaven, therefore, as well as earth and hell, was arrayed against him; and in sustaining the infliction, in triumphing in the mysterious conflict, he was proved to be the mighty God. In the words of an eminent commentator, "He was the true Israel, who wrestled with God, and prevailed."

But it was a fearful conflict, under which he was constrained to say, "All my bones are out of joint." He did, however, triumph; and in virtue of his triumph, he became what his next

title in the passage before us bears, "The everlasting (or eternal) Father," the Father of eternity,—that is, the founder or the author of eternity,—even an eternity of holy blessedness for as many as believe in and obey him. In this sense, as the founder of an eternal kingdom,—a kingdom that cannot be moved,—he is the Father of all who are the subjects of that kingdom. In reference to the Father, he is the elder brother of his people, for, having taken part with them of flesh and blood, "he is not ashamed to call them brethren." But in respect that he has by his death founded an eternal kingdom, he is the Father of all those who are the subjects of that kingdom; and when he shall at last present them "before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy," he will say in regard to them, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me."

And what more can be said of him? Yes, there is something more still. He has another title—"The Prince of Peace." On this I need not dwell. The founder of such a kingdom as we have now been considering must be pre-eminently the Prince of Peace; for it is a kingdom which nothing can move, or disturb, or hurt, or destroy, and, therefore, in the largest sense of the word, a kingdom of peace. But it is so, not only doctrinally, but, to true believers, experimentally. Christ shed his blood to make peace. The application of that blood to them pacifies their conscience, or, in the emphatic language of Scripture, imparts to them a sense of peace with God,—even that peace which passeth understanding. Under the influence of the love of Christ, they seek earnestly to follow peace with all men. But even if they should fail in this, they have still a peace of which even all men united cannot deprive them. They hear the voice of their Prince saying unto them, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

VIII.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRIST.

ISAIAH XI. 1-5.

THIS chapter contains one of the clearest and richest representations of the person, and character, and work, and kingdom of Christ, as Mediator, which is to be found in Old Testament prophecy. In the first verse, Christ is introduced under the figure of "a rod out of the stem of Jesse," and "a Branch out of his roots." In this figure there is an obvious allusion to a previous prediction of the prophet, in the preceding chapter. There we find him foretelling that the king of Assyria was, in the overruling providence of God, to be sent against Israel, and also against Judah, to execute upon them the divine judgments, because of their backsliding and hypocrisy. But having foretold this as a solemn warning, especially to the house of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the prophet proceeded to denounce still heavier judgments on the king of Assyria himself, because that haughty monarch, though an instrument to chastise Israel and Judah, was actuated only by his own ambitious lust of power, and by the impious idea that he would conquer Israel, in defiance of Israel's God. Accordingly, God is represented as saying concerning him, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger; . . . I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge. . . . Howbeit he meaneth not so,"—that is, he did not understand or believe that the God of Israel, the true God, was employing him as a mere instrument

for the chastisement of his people,—“Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. . . . For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent. . . . Therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion,”—that is, the true Church, the faithful remnant,—“be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction.”

All this was a prediction of the ruin that was to come on Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, because of his blasphemous defiance of the God of Israel; and, towards the close of the chapter, the prophet sets forth this ruin under the figure of a great forest cut down, and laid desolate: “Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.” But while the prophet thus foretold the destruction that was coming upon the king of Assyria, and which was soon after executed, when, in the time of Hezekiah, the angel of the Lord went forth, and in one night smote in the camp of Sennacherib an hundred and four-score and five thousand, he saw in prophetic vision, though still far off, an unspeakably more glorious deliverance for the people of God,—that of which all preceding deliverances were but types,—even the coming of Him who was to establish his kingdom, the kingdom of light, on the ruins of the kingdom of darkness. As usual in other cases, while the prophet foresaw and foretold the nearer interposition which was to take place on behalf of the Church in the days of Hezekiah, there was presented to him in vision that glorious interposition which formed the great subject of all Scripture type and prophecy,—even the appearing of Christ, God manifest in the flesh, to destroy the works of the devil. And, on the occasion here referred to, the revelation vouchsafed to the prophet derives a peculiar interest from the striking contrast between the figure by which Christ is set forth, and that which had just been employed to represent Sennacherib, and the enemies of the Church generally. The king of Assyria and his host

appeared to the prophet as a mighty forest, which he beheld cut down, and laid utterly desolate, while the great Deliverer was presented to him in prophetic vision as "a rod," or sprout, coming forth "out of the stem of Jesse, and as a Branch" growing "out of his roots."

It will be recollected that this is a figure repeatedly employed elsewhere in Scripture to set forth the incarnation and birth of Christ. But nowhere does it more fully and expressively describe the condition and circumstances in which he appeared, whether we view it in reference to himself personally, or whether we consider it as foretelling the state to which the house of David was to be reduced, before the long-promised heir of David's throne should appear to assert his right. That royal house is here represented as a tree cut down, the roots only remaining in the ground; and the more emphatically to intimate how entirely, to outward appearance, it was to be bereft of all marks or signs of royalty, it is represented as the stem, or root, not of David, but of Jesse, David's father, who never occupied any other than a private station, and who was, therefore, a more fit representative of the humble condition to which his house was to be reduced, than David would have been, whose name is always identified with royalty. And need I remark how truly this prediction accorded with the actual state of things at the time of our Lord's appearing? The supreme authority among the Jews was about to be transferred to a heathen power;—the sceptre was departing from Judah,—and David's royal house might be said to be represented in the person of the obscure and humble Mary. And in reference to Christ himself personally, the prediction was fulfilled with equal accuracy. He was, indeed, as a rod, or sprout, from the stem of Jesse, and as a branch out of his roots,—or, as this same prophet has elsewhere expressed it, He grew up as "a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground:" he had "no form nor comeliness;" and when men saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the circumstances of the Saviour's birth, and the obscurity of his early life, as illustrative of the prediction in this passage. These will readily occur to every one. But this very lowliness of his condition serves, by contrast, to bring out more fully the surpassing glory of his person, and cha-

racter, and kingdom, as set forth by the prophet in the subsequent verses of this chapter. "And the Spirit of the Lord," says he, "shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord." This statement, it will be remembered, is substantially the same with what we find elsewhere in Scripture. Thus, it is said by the same prophet, in the 42d chapter, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." And again, in the 61st chapter, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God."

This passage was appropriated by our Lord to himself in the synagogue of Nazareth, whereby he declared that when the prophet uttered these and similar words, he spoke of Christ, or in Christ's name. In the New Testament, too, we find repeated declarations to the same effect,—namely, that the Spirit of God was imparted to and made to rest upon Jesus Christ, and that in a peculiar manner. Thus we are told that when Jesus was baptized of John in Jordan, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and lighted upon him. In like manner, when John explained to those about him how he came to know Jesus as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, he thus spoke, "I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." And some time after, when John's disciples came to him, and spoke of Christ, saying that all men were following him, John said unto them, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. . . . He must increase, but I must decrease. . . . He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."

All these passages, and others that might be quoted, announce the general truth, that the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon the man Jesus Christ, fitting and qualifying him for the great work to which he was set apart, as the one Mediator between God and man. As the Scriptures elsewhere testify that it was by the power of the Holy Ghost that the human nature of Christ was conceived, and born a holy thing, so the passage before us, and the other passages referred to, testify that by the power of the same Spirit, this holy thing, this human nature which was united with the divine, was endowed richly, yea, even without measure, with all those graces and divine excellencies that were necessary to its absolute perfection, and its eternal union in one person with the Lord from heaven. Whatever might be the nature of the communications which took place between the divine and human natures of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Scriptures which I have quoted do very plainly declare that it was the Holy Ghost who adorned and enriched the humanity of Christ with all those graces and virtues which as a man he was required to exercise amidst the severe and varied trials which he was required to encounter, in carrying on and finishing the great work which he had undertaken.

But of all the passages in which this truth is announced, there is none in which it is more clearly and largely set forth than it is in the passage under consideration. It is not merely asserted, in general terms, that the Spirit of the Lord was to rest upon him who is here foretold as the rod that was to come forth out of the stem of Jesse, and as the Branch that was to grow out of his roots. While the lowliness of Christ's human nature is thus emphatically expressed, under the figure of a branch, or shoot, springing up from the roots of a tree apparently dead, great care is taken, by a large and copious description of the Spirit that was to rest upon him, to set forth the fulness of grace and truth wherewith he was to be endowed. As if it were not enough to say that the Spirit of the Lord was to descend upon and abide with him, the Spirit himself is described by various titles, expressive of the gracious qualifications wherewith he was to fill and adorn the human soul of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, when it is said in the gospel by John, that the Father gave not the Spirit by measure unto the Son, I could conceive that the

statement had a direct reference to the passage before us : "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord."

The truth of this remark will appear still more probable, if not absolutely certain, if we consider a little more particularly the language in which the prophet here describes the Holy Spirit. It will be observed that besides the general appellation, "the Spirit of the Lord," there are six attributes or titles here given to him,—the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of might, the spirit of knowledge, and the spirit of the fear of the Lord. Nobody can fail to remark, that something very emphatic or expressive must be intended by such an enumeration ; and this obvious reflection has led to the inquiry, whether there are not other passages of Scripture that may throw light on the passage before us, and explain why it is that the Holy Ghost is here described by such a variety of attributes. I have already observed that these attributes are six in number, besides the general title, "the Spirit of the Lord." But this is the title which is elsewhere repeatedly applied to the Holy Ghost, not merely as a general name, but as especially descriptive of his work, or office, as the spirit of prophecy. Thus it is said of the seventy men of the elders of Israel, who were selected to assist Moses in judging the people, that the Lord took of the Spirit that had already been imparted to Moses, and put it upon them, "And it came to pass, that when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied and did not cease." In like manner, it is said in the remarkable prophecy in Joel, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh ; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." And in the 61st chapter of this same book, it appears to be the Spirit of prophecy that is especially referred to, when it is said, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, . . . to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

It has been supposed, therefore, and, I think, on good ground, that when it is said, "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him," we are especially to understand the spirit of prophecy,—thus making seven distinct attributes or titles under which the Holy Ghost is here set forth ; and if so, then there is a very re-

markable coincidence between the passage before us and other passages of Scripture in which the Spirit is spoken of, and spoken of especially in all the fulness of his divine influences. Thus, in the book of Zechariah, where, at the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem, after the return of the captive Jews from Babylon, the prophet was commissioned to assure the covenant people of God, that in spite of all opposition the temple would certainly be rebuilt,—for, says the prophet, “This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts,”—the fulness of grace and power of the Spirit to accomplish this was set forth under the emblem of a bowl set upon the top of a golden candlestick,—the candlestick representing the Church,—“and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps,” conveying the golden oil,—that is, the Spirit’s divine power and energy. In like manner, in the 1st chapter of Revelation, the apostle John speaks of the Holy Ghost under the name or title of the seven Spirits, when he thus salutes the Churches of Asia: “Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne.” And repeatedly afterwards we find him employing the same language in representing the Spirit as resting upon or abiding with Christ, and as sent forth by him for the execution of his mediatorial purposes. Thus, in the 3d chapter, he says unto the angel of the church in Sardis, “These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God.” Again, in the 4th chapter, where he describes the vision that was presented to him, when he beheld a door open in heaven, and a throne set, he says, “And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.” And in the 5th chapter we find him saying, “I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb, as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.”

The obvious purpose in all these passages is to set forth the Holy Spirit in all the infinite fulness of his divine wisdom, power, and might, and that in connection with Christ, or rather resting upon Christ as Mediator. This fulness, moreover, is represented by seven, as if that number indicated perfection; and

this expression would almost lead us to conclude that it was used in reference to the passage before us. At all events, the coincidence is so remarkable, that we may safely regard the prediction in the passage under consideration and the passages now quoted as mutual commentaries on each other;—or perhaps I ought rather to say, that the vision vouchsafed to John when he beheld a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, was the fulfilment of the promise given to Isaiah in the vision which he saw concerning the rod that was to spring from the stem of Jesse, and of which he says, “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord.”

It appears, then, that this passage contains a large and full description of the work of the Holy Spirit on the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, making that human nature perfect in every grace and excellence as a man, fitted to be united with the divine nature, and qualified for doing and enduring all that was to be required of the Mediator between God and man. The passage before us, in fact, expresses more at length what is briefly summed up in the Gospel by John, where it is said of Christ, “The Father giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him;” or when it is said by the apostle, “It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell,”—“in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Of such a fulness of spiritual power and energy we cannot conceive; but we can understand somewhat of the manifestations of these spiritual endowments as here described, and as they actually appeared in the life and character of Jesus during his abode on earth. In regard to the Spirit’s gift of prophecy,—that by which he reveals the secret counsels of Jehovah, especially that eternal counsel wherein God purposed the redemption of the Church,—Jesus was proved to be pre-eminently the prophet, not only instructed in the whole will and purpose of the Father, but endowed with the capacity of clearly and powerfully expounding that will to the conviction and confusion of the ungodly, as well as to the comfort and edification of the Church. Of his wisdom and understanding,—wisdom to discern all that was good and true, and understanding for the practical

application of that wisdom,—we have recorded a very early and remarkable manifestation: for while yet only twelve years old, he was found “in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.” And he increased, we are told, in wisdom, as he did in stature.

Equally manifest was it that the spirit of counsel and of might rested upon him; for what was his whole personal ministry but one continued labour of love and compassion, imparting counsel to the perplexed, and consolation to the broken-hearted, inviting them to come to him for that rest which they laboured in vain to find by going about to establish a righteousness of their own. And it was testified, not only by those who were persuaded to take his counsel and comply with his invitation, but by those generally who heard him, that the spirit of might accompanied his preaching; for we are told that not only did they wonder “at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth,” but “they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?” On other occasions, it is recorded of him in similar language, that the people “were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power;” that he taught “as one that had authority, and not as the scribes;” nay, that even the officers who were sent to take him returned without executing their orders, saying, “Never man spake like this man.”

We cannot doubt that the power or might which thus accompanied the Lord’s preaching was effectual for the conversion of many. But we can as little doubt that many a guilty but unconverted soul was stirred by that same preaching to the utmost depths of its chambers of imagery, and had all its natural enmity to God roused to the highest pitch of desperate malignity,—a malignity which was gratified only by joining at last in the hideous cry, “Crucify him, crucify him.”

But, finally, it was manifested very clearly by all that Jesus said, and did, and suffered, that there rested upon him the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord,—that is, the spirit of the knowledge of the Lord, and the spirit of the fear of the Lord. In other words, Jesus clearly apprehended or understood the infinite excellence of the divine character, and he appreciated that excellence, cherishing towards God all those feelings of

admiration, love, and confidence, which his glorious perfections are fitted to awaken. Hence we find him saying, "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father." "If I honour myself," saith he, on another occasion, to the unbelieving Jews,— "If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying." "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemeth good in thy sight."

It was thus that the human nature of the Lord Jesus was endowed by the Spirit with all fulness of grace, so as to be fitted to be taken into intimate and mysterious union with the divine nature, and qualified for the accomplishment of all that was required of him as Mediator. It was thus that while the Son of God took part of flesh and blood, and was in all things "made like unto his brethren," those whom he undertook to redeem, and was in all points tempted like as they are, yet he did no sin, "neither was guile found in his mouth." Though partaking in the infirmities of his people, and touched with a feeling of these infirmities, he was, nevertheless, "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Having thus received the Spirit without measure, he imparts of the same to his body, the Church, even to all who believe in him, who receive out of his fulness, and grace for grace; for as there is one body, so is there one Spirit. And thus was he in all respects qualified to be a "merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God," not only in making reconciliation for the sins of his people, but for perfecting that which concerneth them, that they "might be filled with all the fulness of God."

While the prophet thus sets forth the fulness of grace and truth which dwelt in Christ, and by which he was qualified for all the offices pertaining to his great undertaking as Mediator, it is to his qualifications and character as a King that the passage before us does more particularly refer. This, indeed, is plainly

intimated by the title here given to him,—“a rod out of the stem of Jesse,”—the descendant of David, and the heir of his throne. And, accordingly, the prophet proceeds to describe the manner in which the Messiah, as a King, was to exercise the gifts wherewith the Spirit of the Lord did without measure endow him: “And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord;” that is, the Spirit of the Lord resting upon him shall make him quick in discerning where the fear of the Lord is, or, in other words, discriminating between the godly and the ungodly. The expression, “fear of the Lord,” is obviously to be understood here in its largest sense, as comprehending every thing that constitutes a godly man; and such a man the prophet says Messiah would at once, and with infallible certainty, distinguish from hypocrites, as well as from the openly wicked, and such a man only would he recognise as a subject of his kingdom.

And having this quick, this penetrating judgment, which could look into the inner man, he would not be dependent, as earthly kings and rulers are, on outward appearances,—he would not “judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.” Judgments founded on mere appearances may be, and frequently are, unrighteous. “But,” says the prophet, “with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth;” that is, he will execute all the functions of a King towards his subjects in righteousness and equity, and these subjects are the poor and the meek.

This designation may, perhaps, be understood literally as meaning the poor and the humble in regard to worldly circumstances, and may be designed to intimate, in regard to the principle of Messiah’s judgment, that, so far from being founded on external appearance or worldly considerations, it would be found that they who had the least to recommend them in the estimation of the world would often be the special objects of his gracious concern. And this we know is a truth, whether it be taught here or not. But even if it be taught here, it does not exhaust the meaning of the expression, “poor” and “meek of the earth.” These terms do also, and especially, refer to the moral and spiritual character of his subjects, as the same terms do in many other passages of Scripture.

The words are descriptive of those who have the fear of the

Lord,—who are poor in spirit, and humble in heart,—convinced of their guilt and helplessness, and persuaded to embrace, with all gratitude and gladness, God's own proposals of pardon and reconciliation. For such Christ undertakes. Having, as their great High Priest, reconciled them to God, he exercises in them and over them the office of a King,—ordering in righteousness all things that concern them,—and, by his gracious discipline, training them to a meetness for the kingdom of glory. It is on their behalf also, and with a view to their interests, that he conducts the government of the world generally, and regulates his procedure towards the ungodly, the enemies of himself and of his Church; for it is added, in the last clause of the verse, “He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.” The kings of the earth and the rulers thereof must employ carnal weapons to maintain their authority, to defend the peaceable, and to punish the rebellious of their subjects. Not so Messiah. As it is by his word that he gains all his conquests over his own people, subduing them unto himself, and making them willing in a day of his power; so it is by his word, the breath of his mouth, that he now controls, and will hereafter destroy his enemies. He does not, indeed, inflict immediate punishment on his adversaries,—nay, he may sometimes permit them apparently to triumph, even to the great distress and discouragement of his own people. But he has only to speak the word, and these adversaries are restrained, and rebuked, defeated in their counsels, and ensnared to their ruin in their own devices, so far as the true interests of his Church require him so to interpose. And then, at last, the prediction in the passage under consideration will be fulfilled in all the extent of its terrible meaning, when, as the righteous Judge, he will give forth a sentence, accompanied with an almighty power, to consign the impenitent and ungodly to a state of retribution.

There is, in all this description of the exercise of Christ's kingly power, a very sublime contrast to the imbecility and weakness of earthly kings. But the contrast becomes more striking by what is stated in the next verse, where it is foretold that Messiah was to be invested with none of the pomp and pageantry wherewith earthly sovereigns are wont to dazzle and

to awe their subjects. He was to wear none of the external badges of royalty, or imposing ensigns of authority and power. He was not to appear as earthly monarchs appear, clothed in purple, bearing a crown, and girt with a sword. But as his kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, and as the subjects of that kingdom are the poor and meek of the earth, clothed in his righteousness in the sight of God, and adorned in the sight of men with personal righteousness, by the sanctifying power of his Spirit; so his glory as their King was to consist in this, that "righteousness" should be "the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."

It will readily occur to all who are familiar with the New Testament, that much occurred, during the Lord's abode on earth, to furnish illustrations of what the prophet thus foretold concerning the person and character of Christ, and of the subjects of his government. These subjects were, indeed, literally the poor and the humble, as to worldly circumstances; and, by his grace, they became morally and spiritually the poor and the meek of the earth. He himself, too, appeared in circumstances the most unlike that can be conceived to those of earthly sovereigns; and to an ungodly and unbelieving world, he appears to this day as little worthy of the homage due to a king, as he appeared to be in the eyes of the unbelieving Jews, who despised and rejected him. And yet, even in the days of his humiliation, and amidst all the lowliness of a meek, and patient, and insulted sufferer, the glory of his character as an absolute sovereign did frequently break forth. He controlled with a word the elements of nature. He commanded devils, unclean spirits, and they obeyed him. He silenced and put to shame the most artful of his enemies, and paralysed the strength of those who were ready to take him. And, in obedience to his simple call, his disciples forsook all and followed him. And since his exaltation to glory, he has achieved, by his Word, innumerable conquests, converting the bitterest of his enemies into the meek and humble subjects of his spiritual kingdom; and though the impenitent and ungodly despise his authority, and regard not the operations of his hands, yet the time will come when even they shall be made to know and understand that they were under his control,—that they prospered in their ungodly enterprises only so far as he permitted,—that he

had only to speak the word, and their counsels were defeated, and their strength withered,—so that “the stout-hearted are spoiled, . . . and none of the men of might have found their hands,” and that at last they are destroyed by the breath of his mouth.

But in the days of his flesh, he furnished illustrations also of what is here predicted of him, when it is said, “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, . . . and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord,” so that “he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.” Not only is it declared of Jesus in the gospel history, that “he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man;” but he gave many striking proofs of his intimate acquaintance with the hearts of all. He detected and exposed the secret murmurings and intentions of his enemies, to their own conviction and confusion. His disciples were constantly made to feel that their inmost thoughts were not hid from him. And in the judgment which he pronounced on Nathanael, when he called him “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile;” and on the poor despised woman, who “washed his feet with her tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head,” and of whom he declared that “she loved much;”—in these, and in other cases, he illustrated the statement of the prophet in the passage before us, that he should be “of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.”

And how full of consolation and encouragement should this view of the Saviour’s character be to the humble and downcast in spirit! However weak their faith, however feeble the living principle which, by his grace, has been implanted in their heart, he sees it, though they may be hardly conscious of it, and he will cherish and strengthen it; nor is there one holy desire in their heart which he does not perceive, and which he will not sooner or later satisfy. And, on the other hand, how solemn the thought to all Christ’s professing people, that “all things are open and naked to the eyes of him with whom they have to do;” that “his eyes are as a flame of fire,” and that one of the last communications which he vouchsafed to his servant is in these words: “All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.”

IX.

THE PEACEFUL STATE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

ISAIAH XI. 6.

To the Church, the true people of God, the faithful remnant in Isaiah's time, the prediction contained in this chapter must have been very precious, being full of encouragement and consolation. For more than two hundred years, there had been a gradual decline of the true religion in Judah. There was not, indeed, in Judah, that sudden and almost universal apostacy into which the other ten tribes fell, when they revolted from the house of David, and formed the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam ; while, besides this, Judah experienced from time to time a season of revival, when God was pleased to place on the throne a king who feared him, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and who was instrumental in arresting the tide of ungodliness and profligacy, and securing a season of repose and refreshing for the people of God. Still, however, there was a growing declension on the part of Judah in reference to religion. Many of her kings openly avowed and countenanced idolatry ; the priests were but too ready to lend themselves the willing instruments to forward their sovereigns' ungodly purposes ; and false prophets laboured, and but too successfully, to persuade the people that these purposes were in accordance with the divine will. The consequence was, that they were frequently visited with heavy judgments. Besides the internal disorder, insecurity, and suffering, which arose out of misgovernment,

they were exposed to the assaults of enemies from without, by whom they were greatly distressed. A melancholy example of this had occurred in Isaiah's own time : for it is recorded concerning Ahaz, in whose reign Isaiah prophesied, that he was smitten by the Syrians and the Edomites, and that the Philistines also had invaded the land ; and "the Lord brought Judah low, because of Ahaz, . . . for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord."

In all these public calamities, the true people of God had, of course, their share, in so far as outward suffering was concerned. But to them such a state of things was unspeakably more bitter than to their ungodly countrymen ; inasmuch as they had to mourn over the abounding iniquity, in which others were seeking their gratification, and might be ready to give way to the desponding thought, that they had nothing to look for but the utter extinction of the true religion, and, consequently, the irremediable ruin of the kingdom. And, in such circumstances, can we conceive any thing more consoling to them than would be the prediction contained in this chapter,—a prediction in which the prophet assured them that there was yet to sit on the throne of David a king of David's line, unspeakably surpassing in glory all the kings that went before him, and that he should establish a kingdom of which the purest and most peaceful times of Judah and Israel should prove but shadowy representations. It is true, the prophet plainly intimated, not only that the fulfilment of the prediction was distant, but that in the meantime great disasters awaited the kingdom,—nay, that the royal house of David itself would, to all appearance, become well nigh extinct ; for the glorious King whom he foretold is represented as a rod or sprout out of the stem of Jesse, and as a Branch out of his roots,—implying that the house or family of David would be like a tree that was cut down, the roots only remaining in the ground.

But every one must have observed that throughout the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures,—and, indeed, the New Testament also,—especially in the writings of the prophets, it is usual to comfort the Church under immediate trials by promises of prosperity to the Church, which were only to be fulfilled at a future and very distant period. It was so from the beginning ; for, not to speak of the first and great promise, which, of course,

was not to be fully accomplished for four thousand years,—to say nothing of this, it is recorded of Abraham, that when he was, and had been for five-and-twenty years, a pilgrim in a strange land, and when he began to be depressed and cast down in spirit, because he had no prospect of being any thing else than a pilgrim and a stranger, where he had reason to expect that he was to be possessor and lord, it was told him, for his consolation, that four hundred years after, his posterity should inherit that land as their own. And so God dealt with the Church, Abraham's spiritual seed, in subsequent times; for we find throughout the Scriptures, that, in the time of trouble, the consolation held out to the people of God is very frequently a promise of great prosperity to the Church at some future and distant period; and, moreover, the people of God themselves, under the pressure of affliction, obviously found great consolation in looking forward to the distant fulfilment of these promises.

It has thus been plainly intimated to God's people of all times, that the advancement of his glory, and the final triumph of his cause, ought to be more important in their estimation than their own immediate personal deliverance from the afflictions under which they may labour. And it shows, too, that God's people have felt and admitted that it is so, and that the assurance of this final triumph of the truth has ministered largely to their consolation under their own personal trials. So it must have been with the Church in Isaiah's time, on receiving the glorious prediction concerning Christ and his kingdom contained in this chapter. The prediction itself assured the faithful in Judah, that low as the state of the Church then was, and hopeless as the revival of the true religion might appear to be, the cause of truth would not and could not be overborne. The prediction, too, was from time to time virtually renewed to that and to succeeding generations, when God was pleased to interpose on behalf of the faithful remnant of his people, and to grant them a season of rest and refreshing; as, for example, in the remarkable revivals that took place, first, in the reign of Hezekiah, and afterwards in that of Josiah. In each of them, and especially in the restoration of the Babylonish captivity, a new pledge was given of the fulfilment of what is here foretold by Isaiah,—a

new assurance that, however low the Church might at times be brought, and in whatever tribulations she might be involved, God would yet visit and redeem his people, and raise up an horn of salvation for them in the house of his servant David.

In the first five verses of the chapter, as we have already seen, the prophet sets forth Christ at once in all the lowliness of his condition as the infant son of the decayed house of David, and in all the glory of his character as a King, the heir of David's throne. He represents him as receiving the Spirit in all his fulness,—or, as it is expressed in the New Testament, without measure,—whereby he was to be endowed with all the qualifications necessary for exercising the functions of a king; and then he goes on, in the 6th verse, to describe Messiah's kingdom,—the state of things that was to obtain under his reign,—the condition and the character of those who were to be the subjects of his kingdom: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den."

It is plain, at first sight, that this magnificent description implies a very marvellous change, even an entire revolution, in the state of the world, when brought into subjection to Christ; for it represents creatures the most ferocious not only laying aside their enmity to one another, but living in peace and amity with others which naturally they would devour as their prey. And if the description is to be understood figuratively, as setting forth the change which mankind undergo when they become the subjects of Christ's spiritual government, then what a representation does it give of human nature in its unregenerate state, and the magnitude of the change which it undergoes when brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ! Some, indeed, have supposed that the language of the prophet is to be understood literally, and that it is descriptive of the change which will take place even in the natural world, when, by the full and final establishment of Christ's spiritual kingdom, all moral evil shall be put down. They think that when that glorious consummation

shall take place, all suffering shall be banished, even the sufferings of irrational creatures, and that the universal prevalence of love among men will be accompanied with universal harmony also even in the brute creation. And it is supposed that this view of the subject is confirmed by the apostle when he says, in the 8th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope; because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

Whether there may not be in the passage before us some allusion to a future state of things,—to the "new heavens," and the "new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,"—I cannot venture to decide. But that state of things, I conceive, lies beyond the limits of this last dispensation of grace, when the kingdom of Christ has ceased to be in progress, and has, in fact, merged into the kingdom of glory. But the subsequent portion of this chapter plainly shows, I think, that the verses which we are now considering refer to the present extension of the kingdom of grace, during which the Jews, with the fulness of the Gentile nations, are to be brought into the kingdom of Christ; for it is in that day, or during that dispensation,—namely, the time in which the marvellous change described in the 6th and following verses takes place,—that the glorious king described in the beginning of this chapter is to "set up an ensign for the nations," and is to "assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." Whether, therefore, the prophet's description of the wolf dwelling with the lamb, and the leopard lying down with the kid, may be hereafter literally verified, I do not determine. But there can be no doubt, I think, that it refers mainly to the dispensation of grace,—this last dispensation, during which all the glorious things foretold of Christ's kingdom must be fulfilled, in so far as these refer to the establishment of his kingdom on the ruins of the kingdom of darkness; and, in this view of the subject, the prophet's description is to be understood spiritually, as setting

forth the condition, and character, and blessedness of the subjects of Christ's kingdom,—as, in fact, expressing in substance, though figuratively, what we find the apostle, at a future period, stating without a figure, when he said, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Assuming, then, that the language of the prophet is to be understood figuratively, as describing the peace, and harmony, and mutual love which were to prevail among the subjects of Christ's kingdom, I would observe that the illustration employed to set forth that mutual love necessarily implies that a mighty change would be necessary to produce it. The subjugation of men to the authority of Christ is represented by the figure of taming the most ferocious animals, and so changing their nature as to exhibit the marvellous spectacle of their congregating in harmony with the creatures which they were wont to pursue as their prey,—all ferocity being removed on the one side, and all fear on the other: "The wolf . . . shall dwell with the lamb." The illustration, too, is repeated under a somewhat changed figure. The natural dread of men for certain venomous creatures is represented as being in like manner removed, while the power of these creatures to inflict injury is spoken of as destroyed or taken away: "The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den." Of course, figurative language is not to be interpreted so strictly as to find, in every word or expression, something that corresponds with the subject which the figure is designed to illustrate. But in the case before us, the figurative language is almost a literal description of the character and condition of men before and after they become the true subjects of Christ's spiritual kingdom. This is everywhere doctrinally taught in Scripture; for man in his unregenerate state is everywhere represented as under the reigning power of principles and passions which, when called into action, degrade him below the level of the brutes that perish. Of mankind universally, it is declared that they are guilty before God,—that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be,—and that men are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, being enemies to him in their hearts by

wicked works. And if men thus hate God, hate him who is infinitely perfect, and infinitely worthy of the reverence, admiration, love, and esteem of his intelligent creatures ; if, for the sake of ungodly gratifications, they care not to forfeit his favour, and dare to defy his wrath,—what will they not be prepared to do towards one another, when their selfishness is awakened, and when opportunities occur for gratifying it? It was said by Him who searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, theft, false witness, blasphemies.” The Holy Spirit testifies to the same truth by the mouth of the apostles; “for we ourselves,” says he, “were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” And if such be the doctrine of Scripture,—if it be there declared that there are in all men the seeds of those evils which have now been enumerated, ready to spring up, and to bear fruit in outward deeds,—the same sad truth is taught historically, from the day on which Adam sought to avert from himself, and to direct against Eve, the righteous displeasure of God, down to the present hour. The murder of Abel by his brother was but the commencement of that violence which so filled the earth, that it repented the Lord that he had made man, and he brought in the flood of waters on the world of the ungodly.

When the apostle asserted and illustrated the solemn truth, that the whole world had become guilty before God, he appealed to the history and character of the heathen nations, in the fearful but undeniable charge which he brought against them, as recorded in the 1st chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. They had “changed the truth of God into a lie,” he says, and “for this cause God gave them up unto vile affections,” to be “filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness;” being “full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.” Nor were the Jews in their natural state, and while Israel only in name, exempted from the same charge; for of them he says, They “both killed the Lord Jesus, and their

own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men." And does not the history of the world at large bear witness that unregenerate human nature has been all that Scripture declares it to be, and that in every age and in every country? Nay, have we not seen in our own day, even now, a melancholy confirmation of this truth in a community which boasted of having discovered, in its own resources, what had escaped the sagacity of men in all other ages and countries,—namely, an infallible remedy for every social evil, and a sure and simple plan of diffusing universal comfort, prosperity, and peace. In that community, and in the very act of carrying out their boasted scheme of uniting all in one harmonious happy brotherhood, we have seen the ferocious passions of human nature manifested in the perpetration of atrocities, seldom, if ever, exceeded in the history of human crimes. And what is all the ferocity of wild beasts compared with this! It is very true that such violent outbreaks of human passion are comparatively rare, even among ungodly men; for God, in his infinite goodness, and for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes, lays restraints in ten thousand ways on the unholy passions of mankind. But there is enough in all lands, and in every state of society, to illustrate the statements of Scripture regarding human nature in its unregenerate state, and to show that but for restraining grace, mankind of all times, and in all places, would manifest the worst that is said of them in the Word of God.

But the same Word testifies, that when men are regenerated,—when, by the Spirit of God, they are convinced of their sin and misery, and persuaded to flee to Christ,—and are thus subdued, and made willing in a day of divine power, they are thenceforward new creatures, manifesting a spirit, and temper, and disposition the opposite of what before characterised them. "If any man," says the apostle, "be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The old and the new things he elsewhere thus places in contrast with one another: "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like." "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-

suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." In admonishing believers, too, the apostle dwells especially on the cultivation of a meek, and gentle, and forgiving spirit: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." And need I add that the Saviour himself, while he condescended personally to teach his disciples, inculcated mutual love, as that which was to be their distinguishing badge: "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Could we conceive, then, such men as we have already referred to as perpetrating on their fellow-men the most horrid cruelties, for objects, if not altogether fanciful, at least of mere temporary interest;—could we conceive, I say, such persons brought under the influence of the gospel, taken captive to the obedience of Christ, and exhibiting, in some good measure, the Spirit of Christ, would we not see, in such a case, an example of all that the prophet has here foretold? and should we not feel that it was less a figurative than a literal prediction which he uttered, when he said, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them?"

In these remarks, I have proceeded on the assumption that the prediction in the passage before us has been and still is in progress towards fulfilment,—that, in fact, every case of real conversion to God contributes to that fulfilment. It may, perhaps, be alleged, however, that neither in the world at large, nor even in those communities which have the best claim to be called Christian, has there hitherto been any thing like a general and palpable exhibition of such a state of things as is here described; and it may hence be inferred, that we must look forward to a future period for the fulfilment of this prophecy,—to a time differing altogether in character from any past period in the history of the Church. It is upon some such ground, I believe, that many have considered the prediction in this passage as referring altogether to that time which we are undoubtedly taught to look for, and which is, in fact, referred to in this very chapter, when the spread of the gospel shall be, what it has never yet been, univer-

sal, and when it will be literally true that all nations shall be blessed in Jesus, and men of every nation shall call him blessed.

Now, it cannot be doubted that the prediction before us does refer, or, I should rather say, does extend to that period, and that then it will receive its accomplishment as it had never before received it. The passage, indeed, expressly speaks of that time as comprehended within the scope of the prophecy; for it is said, in the 9th verse, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." And that the prophecy extended forward to the full and final establishment of Christ's kingdom, when the Jews, with the fulness of the Gentile nations, shall be gathered into it, is farther evident from what is said in the 10th and following verses: "And in that day,"—that is, in the course of the time here spoken of, the progress of Messiah's kingdom,—“in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.” “And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”

But while it is thus obviously true that the vision vouchsafed to the prophet comprehended the latter day glory, and he did accordingly speak of it, yet it does not follow, I think, that his prophecy refers exclusively to that time, and that he neither saw nor intended to speak of the intermediate period of the history of the Church, between the birth of Christ, whom he beheld springing up as a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and the final acknowledgment of his spiritual authority by all the nations of the earth. It appears to me that the prophet's commission was not merely to predict a certain definite and distant period of time, at which there would be a very glorious manifestation of the authority and power of the King who was one day to sit on the throne of David,—even Christ; but that he was instructed also to set forth the nature of Christ's kingdom, as the reign of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, in the hearts and consciences of men, and to describe the character and condition of those who should become the subjects of that kingdom. And if so, then, wherever this kingdom is established,—wherever the Gospel has been received, so that its holy principles have been implanted in the heart, and followed by the fruits of

holiness in the life,—there has been, in every such case, an addition made to Christ's kingdom,—to that chosen generation, that holy nation, that peculiar people whom Christ redeemed, and who are ordained to show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Outwardly, indeed, they may have little of the appearance of a nation. They may be widely scattered, forming everywhere a small minority of the community to which they belong, and sometimes the objects of reproach and persecution. In this respect, their condition is very different from what will be the condition of the Church in the latter day. They have trials and temptations to contend with, which will then be unknown; and, from the remaining corruption of their nature, these trials, and the unholy influence of the community around them, may operate upon them for evil, retarding their spiritual growth, keeping alive or reviving those affections and feelings which are still but imperfectly sanctified, and so preventing them from manifesting so fully as they ought the holy principles of their renewed nature, and the character which should distinguish them as the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus. In the latter day, too, there may be expected a more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whereby the subjects of the kingdom may not only be incalculably increased in numbers, but may exhibit in their life and character a much higher standard of holiness than is now generally attained.

But is there no danger of Christians being led to conclude that what is not generally attained is unattainable? Is there no danger of their looking on such passages as that before us as too exclusively referring to the latter time,—as setting forth, not what believers ought to be now, but what they will be in the millennial portion of this the last dispensation? And may not some such secret opinion or impression be one of the causes of their settling down into a state of contentedness with very low attainments in the divine life? If so, they do grievously err, not knowing the Scriptures, and not estimating aright the power of God. Though now they are scattered, and do not form one visible community, but are mingled up with false professors of all degrees, and forming a fragment of a community which is composed of men of all characters, yet they are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,”

and as much under the watchful guardianship of their great King as if they were outwardly separated from the whole world, and surrounded by a visible wall of defence. Though they are subject to trials and exposed to temptations which the Church in the latter day may not experience, yet do not such trials afford them opportunities of manifesting their love and loyalty to their King, which they would not have in the absence of these temptations? And then with regard to the more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter day, Christians would do well to reflect whether any restriction or limit has been assigned to their prayers, their desires, their expectations of the Spirit's influence to the full extent of what may be needful for the service which may be required at their hand, or for the endurance of the trials that may be laid upon them. It were sad to think that we should lose the benefit of promises which we might plead, but which we do not, because we suppose that they belong to a future age of the Church. Let every believer be assured that he is individually required to long, and pray, and labour for realising in his own day all that is here said of the glory of Messiah's kingdom; and the more earnestly that believers do so, the more certainly may we reckon on the near approach of the time when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.

But while it is of great importance, I think, for believers to beware of referring the prediction before us exclusively or too largely to the latter day, it is still true that the glory of that day is here expressly spoken of; inasmuch as a state of things is here foretold which has not yet taken place, and which, when it does take place, will exhibit such an universal prevalence of peace, and harmony, and love, as the world has never yet witnessed,—even the restoration of the Jews, and the ingathering of the whole Gentile world to the Church of the living God. In that day, during or in the course of that dispensation, the root of Jesse will become an ensign to which all the nations shall flock, even as Jacob foretold, "To Shiloh shall the gathering of the people be;" and then the prophet, after announcing the coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles, proceeds to set forth more at large the share which the Jews shall have in this great and glorious revolution, enumerating various countries in which they have been scattered, thereby emphatically intimating, that wherever they are

to be found, there God's hand will find them, and will a second time deliver them, even as of old he delivered them from Egypt, and will bring them into a rest far more glorious than the Canaan into which their fathers had been brought.

In the 10th verse, Christ himself is called the ensign; and in the 12th verse, he is represented as setting up the ensign,—that is, proclaiming himself, by the preaching of the Gospel, as the great King under whom all who come to him shall find security and rest. But the prophet, in order to convey to the Church,—the true people of God,—in his own time, a more lively apprehension of this rest, reckons up those causes of disquietude by which they had been especially vexed, and assures them that all these were one day to cease. For many generations before Isaiah's day, there had been much hostility between the kingdoms of Judah and Israel,—here called Judah and Ephraim. For a still longer period, they had been exposed to frequent inroads from the Philistines, and Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon; and latterly they had suffered from the still more formidable invasion of the Assyrians, who not only carried away Israel, or Ephraim, captive, but threatened also to inflict a similar calamity on Judah. The prophet, therefore, expressly mentions by name all these causes of affliction and trouble, and assures them that they should cease under the government of the promised Messiah: "The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west,"—that is, shall come down upon the Philistines, and bring them under subjection; "they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them."

This warlike language is borrowed from the conflicts which Israel were wont to maintain with the heathen around them, and in which victory was a sure token of the divine favour. But here it is obviously to be understood of a spiritual subjugation, in which these nations were to be brought to acknowledge and obey the same king to whom Judah and Ephraim were to submit. The prophet farther assures the Church, that all obstacles to the gathering in of Judah and Israel should be removed, so that their deliverance should be as glorious, and as clearly seen to be of God, as any that they had ever experienced: "And

the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry shod, and there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt."

All this, let us never forget, was addressed by the prophet to the people of God in his own day, for the purpose of reviving their hope, and strengthening their faith, and refreshing their spirits, in a season of great affliction. It promised them no immediate deliverance from their troubles; for though the promise was virtually renewed from time to time,—as, for example, by the restoration of the Babylonish captivity,—yet the main deliverance to which it referred is still to be fulfilled. But, for the reasons already stated, the prophet knew well that the assurance of Messiah's advent, and of the ultimate extension of his kingdom over all the kingdoms of the world, would minister largely to the consolation and encouragement of the people of God.

And if so, how much more animating and encouraging should that promise be to the Church now? The Church in Isaiah's time were not honoured to be immediate instruments in advancing the Redeemer's kingdom. Believers now are so; and with what zeal and cheerfulness may they not be expected to labour in their holy and honourable vocation? But let them not be impatient. Let them not be anxious to pry into futurity,—into the secret things that belong unto the Lord,—into the times or seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. Let them be contented to labour on, though they may not see the glorious consummation for which they labour. And let them beware of entertaining carnal views of that millennial period to which they profess to look forward, and for which they long. It is not a time of mere outward peace. Many may be willing to see such a time; for who would not be glad to be secured against the dangers, the turmoil, and the tumult of revolution and anarchy? But the peace of that period, come when it may, is a peace which multitudes, I fear, would not relish, even the peace which flows from holiness; for if there shall be nothing to hurt or to destroy in all God's holy mountain, it will be, the prophet says, because "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

X.

THE PRECIOUS CORNER STONE.

ISAIAH XXVIII. 16.

THAT Christ is the foundation here spoken of cannot be doubted; for the verse is repeatedly quoted in the New Testament, and expressly applied to him. Thus, the apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, says of the unbelieving Jews, that, in rejecting Christ, "they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." And the apostle Peter in his first epistle, says of believers that they have come to Christ, "as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." "Wherefore also," he adds, "it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." Nor is the passage we are about to consider the only passage in the Old Testament where Christ is set forth under the figure of a foundation, or corner stone. In the 118th Psalm it is written, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." And this passage, too, is expressly referred to Christ in the New Testament, both by our Lord himself and by his apostles. "Did ye never read in the Scriptures," said Jesus to the unbelieving Jews, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." And the apostle

Peter, in the presence of the council in Jerusalem, declared of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." The figure, indeed, is a very appropriate and expressive one, as setting forth Christ in the relation in which he stands to his people; and, accordingly, many passages are to be found in Scripture where Christ and the Church are spoken of in such a way as to imply that the Church is a building, of which Christ is the foundation, or chief corner-stone. But though the figure here employed to foretell and represent Christ is one that might have been employed on any occasion, being very significant and full of meaning, we shall find that, like many others of Isaiah's predictions of the Messiah, it was very seasonable, as well as appropriate, being peculiarly fitted to confirm the faith and to revive the hope of the Church,—the people of God,—in the circumstances in which they then stood.

It will be recollected that Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of at least four kings of Judah, and that though he witnessed the revival and reformation which took place in the reign of Hezekiah, he had previously witnessed, also, the grievous backsliding and apostasy of Judah under the wicked reign of Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, of whom it is recorded, not only that "he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him," saying, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me;" but that he "shut up the doors of the house of the Lord," and "made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem." Now, there is enough, I think, in the 28th chapter, to warrant the conclusion, that the prediction in the verse under consideration was delivered during this dark and disastrous period in the reign of Ahaz. The chapter begins with foretelling the terrible overthrow that was coming very speedily on Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel, or the ten tribes; with a promise, at the same time, that the Lord would be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people,—that is, Judah. But the prophet goes on to complain that even they, the men of Judah and Jerusalem generally, instead of taking warning by the fate of Israel, were rapidly following in the same infatuated course, and treasuring up for themselves the same terrible disasters. He repre-

sents them as refusing to hear the word of God, which was still addressed to them, warning them of the ruin in which the guilty course which they were pursuing must terminate, and telling them, at the same time, how they might still find security and peace : "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear." Nay, such was their confidence in the resources of their own wisdom and strength, and in the ungodly alliances which they had formed with the heathen, that they considered themselves beyond the reach of any calamity that might overtake Israel. They virtually said by their conduct, if not in words, "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves." And because they thus boasted of the refuge which they had secured, the sure and immoveable foundation, as they thought, which they had laid for their peace and security ; "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation : he that believeth shall not make haste."

It will readily be perceived that this passage derives a peculiar force from the manner in which it is introduced. The apostate king of Judah, with his nobles and rulers, and, it is to be feared, many of his people, were glorying in the foundation which they thought they had laid for their prosperity and greatness; and, therefore, it was announced to them that Jehovah himself had laid a foundation,—an announcement which did very emphatically express the guilt which they had contracted in forsaking the Lord, and the ruin which would assuredly overtake them. But it is further declared that this foundation is laid in Zion,—that place on which so many of the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem had turned their back, preferring the altars of idolatry to the house of God, the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory; and from this declaration, too, they might have learned that Jehovah would, sooner or later, vindicate his supremacy, which they denied, and avenge the quarrel of his covenant, which they had broken. But that they might not misunderstand these intimations, plain and solemn as they were, it is finally said of the foundation which God laid in Zion, "Whosoever believeth shall not make haste;"

while it was expressly declared to backsliders in Judah and Jerusalem, "Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it."

But if the passage before us was thus very emphatic and full of meaning as addressed to backsliding Judah, warning them of coming judgment, it was not less so as intended for the consolation and encouragement of the faithful remnant of God's people. And greatly did they stand in need of such encouragement. They had witnessed sad events in their own day, and the prospect of the future was sufficiently gloomy. They had seen mount Zion, heretofore the joy of the whole earth, the city of the great King, despised and forsaken, yea, even profaned by the erection of idolatrous altars in the very precincts of the Lord's house,—the place which he had chosen to put his name there. If they were not altogether shut out from the house of the Lord, as we know was the case about that time, they must have experienced many hindrances and much reproach in observing the ordinances of divine appointment,—those ordinances in which they had been wont to find consolation and spiritual refreshment. Already had they seen Judah brought very low, because of Ahaz, her idolatrous king; and they beheld him still clinging to his ungodly alliances with the heathen, which they knew could only be the ruin of him and of his people. Every thing, then, seemed to presage, not only the degradation and ruin of Judah as a kingdom, but the overthrow of all the divine institutions, the very extinction of the true religion. But it was at this season of darkness and apparent desertion that the prophet announced to them the gracious assurance, "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste."

This, as we have already seen, refers to Christ; and the import of the prediction, therefore, was fully unfolded only when Christ actually appeared, and, by the decease which he accomplished at Jerusalem, made manifest the foundation on which sinners may rest their hope of acceptance with God, and, by faith, on which they themselves become living stones in that spiritual temple of which Christ is the chief corner stone. But though this foun-

dation was only then made fully and clearly manifest,—though it was only then, as it were, visibly laid,—yet it had in reality been laid from the beginning; and of this precious truth the clearest intimation that had ever been given was the erection of the temple on mount Zion, and the divine ordinance instituted there. From the first, preparation had been made by all the divine institutions for the coming of Christ; and it was on the ground of what he was certainly to accomplish, that these institutions were the channels by which God was pleased to convey to his people tokens of his favour and forgiveness. But this was especially true of the temple services at Jerusalem, in which were visibly and permanently embodied all previous predictions and promises concerning Christ. When the prophet, therefore, announced to the downcast and afflicted Church of his own day, “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone,” they were assured that, whatever might be the national calamities that were coming upon Judah, whatever might be the desertion of the temple which they then witnessed, or the desolation which yet awaited it, a foundation was laid there which could not be overthrown, for it was laid by Jehovah himself,—by Him who founded the everlasting mountains, and who had chosen mount Zion because he loved it. And they were assured, moreover, that this stone would be to them “a sanctuary,” though he might prove “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel.” “Whosoever believeth shall not make haste.”

This prediction, it will be observed, did not hold out to the Church any very striking outward deliverance, such as had often before been wrought for Israel, and was still to be wrought for them, in their national capacity. On the contrary, it is a promise in the fulfilment of which the true people of God, the faithful remnant, only were to participate. It implied that the protection promised to them was to be experienced at a time when all others were reaping disappointment and misery, in finding that the refuges in which they had been trusting were refuges of lies, which the fierce anger of the Lord burned up and consumed. The figurative language, too, in which the refuge or sanctuary is described, where God’s people were to find shelter from the overflowing scourge, implied that it was a secu-

rity which others would either altogether overlook or utterly despise. It was simply denominated a stone,—tried indeed, and precious, and constituting a sure foundation,—but still exhibiting nothing of that outward grandeur which could attract carnal and worldly men. Nay, the prophet had previously foretold, in a passage already quoted, that to all such that stone would prove the occasion of their fall and their ruin. But the people of God were at the same time assured, that the refuge thus promised to them under the figure of a stone laid in Zion, was none other than Jehovah himself: for his words are, “Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel.” How far the Church of that day understood the meaning of a figure which represented the Lord himself as a stone of foundation, we cannot tell. They understood enough, however, to strengthen their faith, and to keep alive their hope, amidst the darkness and the disasters which encompassed them. And to the Church now the figurative language of this passage is as plain as it is significant.

The Church, as I have already had occasion to remark, is frequently set forth in Scripture as a building,—an house or temple,—of which each individual believer is a lively or living stone, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. And that from the beginning there should have been such a Church, and that from age to age it should continue to receive new additions, in spite of the many and desperate efforts of its enemies to retard or overthrow it, is itself a continued testimony to the truth that Christ is indeed all that he is here represented to be. For many generations he was known only in promise; and when he did appear, it was as a man of sorrows, to be despised and persecuted,—yea, crucified and slain. Nor were they who thus treated him naturally and essentially different from other men; for all are by nature the children of wrath, being the children of disobedience, enemies to God in their heart by wicked works. Yet to countless multitudes, both before and after his appearing, he was the object of faith and trust,—the ground of hope,—the foundation of confidence towards God; and to as many

as did so trust in him, he gave power to become the sons of God. By simple faith in him, in whom the world could see nothing to admire, but every thing to despise, they were separated from that world; and being united to Christ and to one another by a bond indissoluble, but to ungodly men invisible and unaccountable, they formed a body which is most significantly and expressively denominated a "spiritual house," a "building fitly framed together," growing unto "an holy temple in the Lord."

An unbelieving world never would have seen any thing in him who is the foundation or chief corner stone of this building that could render him an object of trust or confidence. But neither could it treat him with indifference when he was manifested to it. It sought his destruction. And, in like manner, they who, in virtue of their union with Christ, become living stones in the spiritual house, become also offensive to the world of the unbelieving and ungodly; and from the beginning, therefore, there has never ceased to be waged a war against the Church of Christ, —a war more or less violent, and assuming a great variety of forms, but having for its object the utter overthrow of that building which has been and still is in progress of erection, to the praise of the glory of God's grace. But the work proceeds notwithstanding. To outward appearance, indeed, its progress may appear to be slow, and at times it may seem to be arrested. But it is advancing. From the mass of ruin in which the whole human race is involved, another and another is raised to form a part of the living temple, whence they may look with adoring wonder to the rock from which they have been hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence they have been digged. Once placed as living stones in that spiritual house, they are safe. They are not, indeed, beyond the reach of assault; for the powers of darkness and an ungodly world are combined against the Church of Christ. But it cannot be overthrown. It is built upon the rock against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

And if such be the security of the Church of Christ in her collective capacity, then every individual member participates in that security. Every believer, therefore, may consider the passage before us as addressed to himself individually. And, indeed, it was originally so addressed; for it was spoken at a time

when the people of God were so few, and when they were so overborne by the false religion of an apostate king and his idolatrous court, that they could hardly have been recognised as an united body, having no influence or authority with a people who sought only to those who would prophesy to them smooth things. The language of the passage, too, intimates that it was designed for the consolation and encouragement of God's people individually; for the promise which it contains is a personal promise,—universal, indeed, but still addressed to all in their individual capacity. “He that believeth,”—every one that believeth,—whosoever believeth,—“shall not make haste.” Every believer, then, is here admonished or invited to look at and to examine the foundation on which he is building his hope, that, in contemplating that foundation, his faith may be strengthened, his hope enlivened, and his heart enlarged, to run in the way of the divine commandments. And believers are reminded that this foundation is one which to the carnal eye presents nothing to attract notice, far less to command confidence. It is called simply a stone,—a thing which men would naturally try to put out of their way, and at which, if they failed to remove it, they would stumble and fall. And so it has fared with multitudes. Multitudes have sought to put that out of their way; but they stumbled and fell. So did the Jews of old, and so do unbelievers still. They fall and are broken. Yet they may be raised again and be healed, and placed upon that very stone, and become part of the spiritual house of which it is the foundation. But if not, then that stone will one day fall upon them, and will grind them to powder.

Such is, in the eyes of worldly men, and such will be in their bitter experience, the stone which God has laid in Zion for a foundation. But to believers he is a tried stone. He was tried from the beginning, even from everlasting. In the counsels of eternal wisdom, when the foreknown fall of man was graciously thought of, and when it was foreseen that a Mediator, able and willing to place himself in the room of the guilty, would be required to prevent the whole fallen family of man from going down into the pit, He who was the Eternal Word, and who is set forth in the passage before us to the faith and hope of sinners, said, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is

written of me, to do thy will, O God." He offered himself a Mediator between God and the fallen children of men; and in doing so, he undertook to satisfy the demands of divine justice, so that pardon might be extended to the guilty, without compromising the honour of the divine law. This was a mighty undertaking. Was he able and qualified for it?

This was a question which could be answered only by Him who is the great Lawgiver and Judge,—who alone knew what his law and justice required in the way of satisfaction,—and who alone was entitled to determine what that satisfaction should be. How, then, was the question answered? Was the offer of mediatorship between God and man accepted? If it was, it must have been because the great Lawgiver and Judge was satisfied that He who had made the offer, and who was willing to undertake to satisfy the demands of divine justice, was able to accomplish what he undertook. And the offer was accepted. The Eternal Word was divinely appointed as Mediator. The Father committed into his hand the vindication of his own law, the maintenance of his own authority, the manifestation of his own character as at once the just God and the Saviour. And in thus investing Christ with the office of Mediator between himself and sinners, has not God declared that he has found him able as well as willing to execute that office? Was not the capacity of the Mediator tried and decided upon by the highest of all tests, even the judgment of the Father, ~~who alone~~ judgment of the Lawgiver, who alone had the right to determine what mediation was consistent with the honour of his law? And if, upon this trial, Christ was intrusted with the vindication of the divine government in the pardon of the guilty,—if, by his obedience unto the death, he was to magnify the divine law, and make it honourable, even in its consenting to the justification of sinners,—is he not infinitely worthy of the confidence of sinners? And is it not emphatically true of the stone which has been laid in Zion for a foundation, that it is indeed "a tried stone?"

It was thus that Christ, by his very appointment to the office of Mediator, was declared to be tried and found competent for the undertaking. And when, in the fulness of time, he actually entered on the undertaking, and while he was engaged in doing

what he had before declared he delighted in, even the will of his Father, a divine testimony was repeatedly borne to his all-sufficiency for his mediatorial work. When, at the commencement of his public ministry, he was baptized of John in Jordan, "Lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him; and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In like manner, on the mount of transfiguration, there came the same voice from the excellent glory, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." And, finally, when Jesus had finished the work which his Father had given him to do, testimony was borne to the perfection of that work, in that he rose again from the dead, and ascended up into heaven, leading captivity captive, and is exalted at the right hand of God, all authority and power being committed to him in heaven and on earth.

But the stone that has been laid in Zion for a foundation is a tried stone in the actual experience of the Church. It was in virtue of the work which Christ had undertaken, and the certainty of his fulfilling that undertaking, that every promise from the beginning was made to the people of God, and every deliverance was wrought on their behalf. But for the work which Christ had pledged himself in covenant to accomplish, there never could have been a promise of mercy to sinful men, nor a ~~gracious~~ ^{provision} ~~provision~~ ^{provision} on their behalf. To him, moreover, in virtue of the same covenant engagement, was committed from the beginning the ordering of all things that concerned his people, those whom he had undertaken to redeem; and though it was not till after the lapse of many generations that he was manifested in the flesh, yet from the first he was intrusted with the deliverance, the preservation, and the guidance of his Church. And in what manner this great trust was executed, the history of the Church does abundantly testify, for it is the history of the most glorious manifestations of divine power, and wisdom, and faithfulness. Whether we look to the mighty works which were wrought on behalf of the Church, the people of God in their collective capacity, or whether we consider what individual believers were enabled to do and endure, through simple faith in the promised deliverer, we see proofs in abundance that He in

whom they confided was alike able and faithful to execute the office with which he was invested. If the Church at large was sometimes brought very low, so as to be well-nigh overwhelmed by her enemies, her temporary depression did in the end more clearly demonstrate the power of Him who watched over her, in the deliverance which was wrought for her even in the last extremity, while his faithfulness also was manifested in subjecting her for a time to salutary discipline.

And so with individuals. If for a season they might feel as if they were utterly forsaken, and might be ready to say, Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious? they were in the end constrained to acknowledge that it was their faith that had failed, not the power or the promise of Him in whom they were called to confide. The trial, indeed, under which their faith and patience had been ready to give way, might not be removed. But when their faith revived, even though their trial remained, they had, in the grace by which they were enabled to endure with patience, a more striking proof of the power and faithfulness of Him on whom they rested, than if they had been delivered from the affliction which had formerly well-nigh overwhelmed them. In the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle has furnished a most striking illustration of the truth of these remarks, in reckoning up the manifold and appalling calamities which the Old Testament saints were enabled to endure through faith in the Saviour, who was then known to them only in promise and in figure for whole Scriptures,—having testified that it is “~~a tried stone~~” the figures, indeed, furnish testimony to the same truth; and had we an inspired record of what believers have been enabled to do and endure since the coming of Christ, we should find similar examples in abundance of his power and faithfulness. From the beginning, therefore, till the present hour, the experience of the Church collectively, and of believers individually, has borne witness that the stone which has been laid in Zion for a foundation is indeed “a tried stone.”

But it is farther asserted of Christ, in the passage before us, that he is “a precious corner stone.” He had been previously declared to be a tried stone,—tried in the judgment of the great Lawgiver, who pronounced him worthy and fit to be Mediator between God and sinners, and declared this judgment by appointing him to that office,—and tried in the experience of those

who trusted in him, and who have, through all successive generations, declared with one voice that he has faithfully fulfilled all that he undertook. This, however, is not all. Not only are those who believe in him placed upon a foundation from which they cannot be removed, but, being placed on a corner stone, they are united to one another, each forming a part of the spiritual house, the living temple, of which Christ is the foundation. This is obviously the idea conveyed by the expression, "corner stone,"—the stone that unites the different parts of the building; and it does, therefore, very emphatically express how certainly and how closely they that are united to Christ will be united to one another. And this idea is brought out still more fully and prominently by the declaration that Christ is "a precious corner stone."

In every point of view, Christ is infinitely precious. He is precious in himself, possessing in his divine nature all the perfections and excellence of the Godhead, and in his human nature enriched and adorned with all the graces of the Spirit that was given to him without measure. He is unspeakably precious also to his people; not only because he is an all-sufficient Saviour, but because he is the only Saviour, whose blood alone could pacify their conscience, and by whose mediation alone they could ever have access unto God. And he is precious, because from his own divine excellence he imparts to all who believe on him a portion of the same excellence, transforming them into his own likeness, and ultimately exalting them to the same glory to which he has himself been exalted. And this, I think, is especially the ground on which Christ is here called "a precious corner stone." The expression implies not only that he unites his people to himself and to one another, but that he makes them like himself, not only giving to them, by imputation, his own righteousness, whereby they are justified in the sight of God, but also making them personally holy, and so qualifying them for the enjoyment of the heavenly inheritance. Such is the interpretation of this passage by the apostle Peter, who, in referring to it, and speaking of sinners coming to Christ, represents them as "coming" to "a living stone;" and then says of such as thus come to Christ, that they also, as lively, or living stones, are "built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer

up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." The idea conveyed by these words plainly is, that the stone which has been laid in Zion for a foundation is not only a living stone, but has also in itself a life-giving power, so that as many as are built thereon are quickened and made living stones also, and are built up a spiritual house. In other words, they who believe in Christ are not only accepted as righteous in the sight of God, but are sanctified also, or made holy,—made to resemble Christ, and, in so far as they do so, are made also to resemble one another.

The passage before us, then, is just one of the manifold forms in which the Scriptures set forth the two great doctrines which do most nearly concern sinners,—namely, the doctrines of justification and sanctification. According to the first, they who are united to Christ by faith are pardoned, reconciled to God, and dealt with as righteous; and according to the second, the same persons are brought under the operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby they are renewed in the spirit of their mind, and transformed into the image of the Son of God. In these two blessings of justification and sanctification is included every thing that sinners need to save them and make them happy; and seeing that Christ has made provision for securing to all who come to him these unspeakable blessings, he is infinitely worthy of their confidence. And so the prophet declares; for having announced the gracious truth, that there has been laid in Zion for a foundation a stone,—having testified that it is "a tried stone," and "a precious corner stone,"—he adds, as a necessary consequence, that it is "a sure foundation." And, in farther confirmation of this truth, he appeals to the experience of believers as itself testifying that Christ is indeed all that he is here declared to be: "He that believeth shall not make haste."

This passage, as we have already seen, is repeatedly referred to in the New Testament, and there the expression, "shall not make haste," is rendered, "shall not be ashamed," and "shall not be confounded." But the phrases are in substance the same. They are designed to contrast the condition of believers with the state of those who rest on a false foundation, or betake themselves to a refuge of lies, and who, on discovering their fatal error, are perplexed and agitated, casting about for deliverance, but know-

ing not where to find it, and, in their confusion and dismay, are compelled to acknowledge that they have reason to be ashamed of their hope. Believers, on the contrary, knowing that the foundation of their hope is unmoveable, and that the object of it cannot be affected by any change in their worldly circumstances, are or may be beyond the reach of such fears and perplexities as distract those who feel that they are ready to be bereft of their all. The last clause of the verse, then, sets forth the peace and the patience in which believers may and ought to possess their souls, even amidst those tribulations which overwhelm the hopes and happiness of other men. And such was the condition of the people of God to whom it was at first addressed. They had already been exposed to severe trials in consequence of the backsliding of their countrymen; and great disasters still awaited Judah, in which believers themselves would unavoidably share. Nothing, therefore, could be more seasonable for them than to be reminded, if they had forgotten, that they had a refuge and a resting-place from which no outward calamity could remove them, and that they might well possess their souls in patience, even though the deliverance which they longed for might be delayed, and though the divine promises might seem to have been forgotten.

And how much more may it not be expected of believers now, that they should exercise faith and patience amidst the trials by which they may be beset? They rest on the same foundation on which the Church has rested from the beginning; for Christ is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." But the revelation of Christ,—the testimony which God has given concerning his Son,—is very different now from what it was when the passage before us was first announced,—different in this respect, that what was then dark and partial is now clear and full, that what was then only promised is now fulfilled, that what was then a subject of prophecy is now a matter of history. Christ is not only now what he was in Isaiah's time, the stone laid by Jehovah in Zion for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation against all the hostility and violence of the powers of darkness, and the enmity of an ungodly world; but revealed as King of kings, and Lord of lords,—as holding in his hand the govern-

ment of the world,—and as employing the very enmity of the adversaries of his Church, so as to be the means of carrying into effect his gracious purposes for the Church's prosperity and final salvation. And with such a revelation of Christ, how steadfast should be the faith and how lively the hope of his people! It was an exercise of strong faith in the Old Testament Church to believe that they were safe in the enjoyment of God's favour, in spite of all worldly trials and reverses, because it was by worldly prosperity that God was wont to give them tokens of his favour. But the Church now has the assurance that worldly calamities, and even the apparent triumphs of the ungodly, are rendered subservient to the general interest of the Church of Christ, and to the spiritual well-being of believers individually. An inspired apostle puts the question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And how does he answer the question? Does he merely say, that, in spite of these, believers should still be united to Christ, experiencing his love, and loving him in return? He says a great deal more. He says, "Nay, in all these we are more than conquerors through him that loved us,"—plainly and very emphatically declaring, that the very calamities which he had enumerated, so far from depriving them of their victory, were rendered the means of enhancing its glory. And such being the provision which Christ has made for perfecting that which concerneth his people, with what confidence may they not dwell on the declaration, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation;" and how reasonably may it not be said of those who believe on him, they "shall not make haste!"

XI.

FORMAL WORSHIP DENOUNCED.

ISAIAH XXIX. 13, 14.

IN the 15th chapter of Matthew's gospel, and in the parallel passage by Mark, we find the passage before us referred to by our Lord, as containing a true description of the character of the Jews in his time. "Ye hypocrites," said he, "well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." We are not, however, to suppose that the passage before us was merely a prophecy,—a prediction of what the Jews were to be in Messiah's day. It is plain, from the preceding and following contexts, that the charge of hypocrisy and superstition contained in the passage under consideration was brought against the people of the prophet's own time,—the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to whom Isaiah was sent. And if his charge against them was found to be equally applicable to the Jews at a future period, it is just a proof how prone that people was at all times to the sin of which they are here accused. From the beginning, indeed, their history presents a melancholy record of backslidings and revolts, exhibiting a strong and perpetual tendency to forsake God altogether, and to sink into the grossest idolatry. And of this the prophet had been an eyewitness, especially during the reign of Ahaz. In the passage

before us, however, the charge brought against Judah and Jerusalem is not that of open, outward, avowed idolatry. It is admitted that they did professedly worship the true God,—that they did outwardly draw near to him. But, then, they drew near to God only with their mouth, and with their lips only did they honour him, having removed their heart far from him; and if they felt or professed any fear towards God, it arose, not from a reverential regard for his word, but from the precept or commandment of men.

And that such was the character of the people generally, at various periods of their history, is abundantly evident from what is recorded of them in Scripture. It must have been especially true of them during those seasons of sudden and general reformation, when, on the accession of a pious sovereign to the throne, the nation, as with one accord, abandoned idol worship, and returned, outwardly at least, to the worship of the true God. At such seasons, there was no doubt, to a considerable extent, a real spiritual reformation, a revival of the true religion. No doubt, many weak and timid believers, who lacked courage to contend with the great mass of an idolatrous community, and who, overborne by the ridicule, and reproach, and hostility of an ungodly generation, were ready, under a feeling of despondency, to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience;—it cannot, I say, be doubted that many such were revived, and refreshed, and invigorated, when, under the protection, and encouraged by the example of a godly king, they could avow their attachment to the worship and service of the God of their fathers. And I believe that it was for their sakes in a peculiar manner, though for the sake also of the true Church generally, that from time to time, in the midst of prevailing idolatry, a king was raised to the throne of Judah, who walked in the ways of David his father, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord.

But though all this, I think, may be taken for granted, and though it is a delightful thought that there were thus seasons of refreshing to the true Church from the presence of the Lord; yet it is but too evident that the people generally were on such occasions but outwardly reformed; for no sooner was the godly king removed, and succeeded by another of a different character, than they returned to idolatry, even in its grossest and most re-

volting form, with an eagerness which showed that they had felt even the outward worship of God to be a grievous burden and restraint, or had submitted to it because, by the influence, and the example, and the authority of the king, it had become the religion of the court, and therefore fashionable. The prophet Isaiah witnessed at least one such reformation,—that which took place in the reign of Hezekiah,—a reformation which, to all appearance, was as sincere as it was universal, but which was very speedily succeeded, on the accession of Manasseh, by an apostasy hardly less general, and still more flagrant than that which preceded Hezekiah's reign. When the prophet, therefore, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, uttered the words of the passage under consideration, he did faithfully describe the people of his own time; for it was plainly true of them, that even when they outwardly professed to worship the true God, they drew near unto him with their mouth, and with their lips they did honour him, but had removed their heart far from him, and their fear toward him was taught by the commandment or precepts of men.

But while the prophet did thus expose the formality and hypocrisy which characterised the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem in his own day, he did, in the spirit of prophecy, describe also with equal fidelity the character of the Jews in Messiah's time. The passage we are now considering, as we have already seen, was expressly referred to by our Lord as applicable to the Jews generally; and the gospel history furnishes illustrations in abundance of the faithfulness of that application. Not only was it true of the people at large, but it was especially true of those who had the highest pretensions to religious zeal and personal holiness, that they drew near to God with their mouth, and honoured him with their lips, while their hearts were removed far from him; inasmuch as the service which they rendered to God consisted in the strict observance of all the rites of the law of Moses, while the spirit of the law was utterly disregarded, or rather habitually violated. It was said of them by him who knew all men, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law," judgment, mercy, faith, and the love of God: "these ought

ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Nor was it less literally true of the Jews generally, that their fear toward God was taught "by the precept of men;" for the spiritual guides taught, and the people were but too ready to learn and believe, that ceremonies which the word of God had never prescribed, and could not be made to sanction, were as acceptable in his sight as the rites which had been divinely appointed. Nay, it was taught and believed, that when the traditions of the elders, on whose authority alone this humanly invented service rested, were found to be in opposition to the plainest declaration of God's word, that word was to give way, and the authority of these traditions was to be upheld.

On this point, also, we have the testimony of Him who cannot err, and given, too, on the very occasion on which he referred to the words of the passage under consideration. The Scribes and Pharisees had come to Jesus, and had said unto him, "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." It thus appears that the description in the passage before us was alike true of the people in Isaiah's day, and of the Jews at the time of our Lord's manifestation in the flesh; and that the sin charged was the same in both cases, though it showed itself in a somewhat different way. But it is equally applicable to still later times; for we have, in the passage under consideration, a most faithful representation of the character of a professedly Christian church, the church of Rome.

I need not enter on any lengthened statement to show that the doctrines held, and the practices sanctioned and inculcated by that church, as a church, go directly to substitute mere forms and outward ceremonies for the simple worship of the heart. I do not say that there are no heart-worshippers in that church. But they are so in spite of the system with which they are con-

nected; for, according to that system, they are accepted with God, and therefore are safe, if they draw near to him with the mouth, and honour him with the lips, though the heart be removed far from him. And with regard to the second part of the charge, that of being taught the fear of God by the precept of men, never could such a charge be brought more truly or to a greater extent than against the Romish church. In fact, we have, in this single expression, a very comprehensive, though concise, statement of the essential character of that church. Her fundamental principle is, that her authority in matters of faith is equal with, or rather superior to that of the Word of God. I say superior, for she claims the exclusive privilege of interpreting, and interpreting infallibly, the holy oracles, and forces her interpretations on the consciences of all her members. Her lofty claim is not held merely as an abstract principle, a matter of theory. She acts upon it practically. She withholds the Bible from the people, and substitutes for it, as the rule of faith, her traditions,—her own interpretations of the Bible,—or her own inventions. And as in the case of Judah and Jerusalem of old, and of the Jews in the time of our Lord, these spiritual guides have not been more forward to teach than men have been to learn; for how many millions of many successive generations have been held in willing bondage to this system of superstition and spiritual despotism! And of what multitudes may it not be said still, that their fear of God is taught by the precept of men!

Here, then, we have a very solemn charge brought against the visible Church in the days of the prophet,—renewed against the same Church by our Lord himself,—and equally applicable to no small portion of the professedly visible Church in later times, down, indeed, to the present hour. And surely there is something in this consideration to awaken serious thought; for it naturally suggests the idea, that there must be a tendency in human nature to fall into the sin which is here exposed and condemned. The passage under consideration contains, as we have seen, a description which is literally true of a vast proportion of the professed worshippers of God at three different periods,—so literally true that, if we did not know when it was written, we might suppose that it was designed exclusively for any one of these three periods. From this consideration alone, we might

infer that the sin which the passage before us condemns is not the growth of circumstances, but the fruit of a principle in human nature, modified, it may be, by circumstances, but essentially the same at all times, and in all places. And no reflecting man, therefore, can read the passage under consideration, with its application in the New Testament, and recollecting, at the same time, how truly it describes what has been for ages, and what still is the condition and character of no small portion of what is called Christendom, without being constrained to inquire whether the sin against which the prophet was commissioned to testify may not be found to prevail even in the purest portions of the visible Church. And can any one doubt that it does very extensively prevail, even in those Christian communities where the opinions which are generally held are sound and scriptural?

Men may be connected with a Church whose doctrine, and discipline, and worship are founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and yet come under the description in the passage under consideration. Indeed, it is so with all who are mere formalists, who have a name to live and are dead. The truths which they profess to believe may be the truths of Scripture; and the worship in which they outwardly engage may be that whereby true believers really hold fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. They may, even in some good measure, understand the truths which they profess, and be so convinced of their divine authority as readily to reject every opinion or doctrine which is opposed to them. And, in like manner, they may perceive the frivolity, and even the sinfulness of those forms and ceremonies which the Word of God has not sanctioned, but which corrupt churches substitute for true spiritual worship. And yet, with all this, the truth may never have come with power to their heart. They may be familiar every day with the great doctrines of Scripture, with their guilty and ruined condition as sinners, with the only ground of acceptance with God through the blood of Christ, with death, and judgment, and eternity,—an eternity of blessedness or misery,—and with the necessity of being not only justified freely through the redemption that is in Jesus, but of being sanctified also by the Holy Spirit, whereby alone they can be qualified for the enjoyment of the happiness to which they professedly look forward.

But they may never have felt any one of these truths to be a great reality, or matter of deep personal concern to themselves, a subject of infinite moment to them, in regard to their peace here and their happiness hereafter. They may be satisfied with merely holding them as matters of opinion, as statements which they believe to be true, never conceiving that any thing more is implied in the faith of the gospel than this assenting to its truth. In giving this assent to it, they may imagine that they are in possession of all the benefits which it is designed to confer on men in this world, and that they are as sure as others of participating in the blessings which are laid up for believers in the world to come. Of these benefits and blessings they may have no distinct conception; for, never having felt their need of them, they have no desire to know what they really are. And if this be all that they understand by believing the gospel, it is plain what their acts of religious worship must be. They can be nothing else than mere outward acts,—bodily services, without life or spirit,—forms, without the substance. They may feel it necessary to observe them, and might be uneasy if they neglected them; but they observe them merely as commanded acts, which it were dangerous to omit, and the performance of which is itself an acceptable thing in the sight of God. Their heart and affections cannot be engaged in any such acts of religious worship. Never having been awakened to any right sense of their guilt, they cannot ask pardon with a deep and heartfelt conviction, that unless they obtain it, and unless they have some good ground to believe that they have obtained it, they never will enjoy one hour's solid peace. Never having seen the deformity and vileness of sin, and never having felt any real desire to be purified and made holy, they cannot with either earnestness or honesty ask the Holy Spirit to sanctify them,—they cannot wish that he would indeed take possession of their hearts, and turn their affections from sin unto God. Never having conceived of any thing real in communion with God, they cannot, in their outward approaches to him, truly seek to have such a sense of his presence as will exclude all other subjects from their thoughts, and will awaken in their minds those feelings which right views of his character and perfections are fitted to awaken. And never having been really sensible of obligation to redeeming grace and mercy, their read-

ing or hearing of the love of Christ, and their contemplating or commemorating his death, cannot be accompanied with any such feeling of gratitude and love as the apostle speaks of, when he says of true believers that the love of Christ constraineth them. And what, then, can be said of such worshippers, but that they draw near unto God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, but their heart is removed far from him?

But this is not all. It is plain that the faith of such worshippers stands not "in the power of God," but "in the wisdom of men." The truths, indeed, which they believe, or think they believe, may be the truths of Scripture; and the acts of religious worship which they observe may in themselves be in accordance with the Word of God. But they do not believe the truth simply as coming from God, making a proposal to them of reconciliation, which they have cordially accepted; and they do not engage in acts of religious worship, as graciously appointed by God, as the channels through which he conveys to them the communications of his grace, and by which there ascends to him the homage of their reverence, gratitude, and love. Their faith and worship are the result of mere human teaching,—the effect of early education, of their connection with a professedly Christian community, and of the influence of example on the part of those whom they have been taught to respect. But under similar training, they would, in other circumstances, have adopted any other faith, and conformed to any other worship. It is true of them, therefore, not only that they draw near unto God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, while their heart is far from him, but also that their fear toward him is taught by the precept of men.

It cannot, I fear, be doubted that such is the character of vast multitudes, even of those who are outwardly connected with those portions of the visible Church in which purity of doctrine, and worship, and discipline, does in some good measure obtain. All men, indeed, in their fallen or unregenerate state, are disposed to rest satisfied with offering to God a mere outward homage. Being more or less conscious of guilt, they cannot, unless sunk into utter insensibility and recklessness, cast off all thought of God, so as in no way to recognise or acknowledge him. But being alienated from God and holiness, they cannot love him, nor offer him the homage of affection; and so long as this is their condi-

tion, they have no other refuge, no other way of keeping their conscience quiet, so as to enjoy the world without disturbance, but to betake themselves to the outward forms of religious worship. And if it be the natural disposition of men thus to remain in a state of mere formalism, believers themselves will acknowledge that there is but too strong a tendency again to return to it. Even they who have known somewhat of the satisfaction and comfort of being able to worship God in spirit and in truth, will confess and lament that they have but too frequently forfeited and lost that comfort. Besides the frequent inroads which the things of time and sense make upon their heart, disqualifying and disinclining them for spiritual exercises altogether, they are but too prone, even when they do engage in them, to be satisfied with having gone through them with some measure of serious and solemn feelings, while not a little of that satisfaction may arise from the mere observance of what they have been accustomed to observe, and what had, on former occasions, yielded them spiritual quickening and comfort.

It becomes, then, an important subject of inquiry to all, how far they may be open to the charge in the passage before us. Multitudes, as we have already seen, even with a fair outward profession, are still in the state here described. But even where there may be something more than this,—where, along with such a profession, there may have been occasions on which men have for a time felt deeply impressed with one or other of the truths of God's Word,—with a solemn sense, it may be, of God's presence and purity, a startling conviction of guilt, and a dread of danger, or perhaps some affecting impression of the reality of the love of Christ awakening something like love to him,—even where there have been such occasional convictions and emotions, men may never have advanced beyond the state here described, where fear towards God is taught by the precept of men. Nay, such occasional seasons of unwonted solemnity may serve only to reconcile them to their state of formality and false security, by affording them ground for concluding that they have experienced all that is to be expected of the quickening and life-giving power which accompanies the faith of the gospel. And when we farther reflect how prone believers themselves are to mistake the satisfaction which they feel in going about religious exercises, because

they are a necessary part of their employment, for the spiritual enjoyment which they do not always attain to, it becomes all of us to inquire frequently and seriously, whether we are not drawing near to God with our mouth, and honouring him with our lips, while our hearts are far from him, and whether, in our regular observance of religious ordinances, we may not in some measure be influenced by the practice of those around us, and thus be chargeable with being taught the fear of God by the precept of men.

But this inquiry is still more solemnly inculcated upon us by the judgment with which God has threatened to visit this formality and hypocrisy: "Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, . . . therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." The judgment of which warning was thus given, was threatened, it will be observed, against the wise and the prudent,—that is, the leading men, the teachers and guides of the people. But it is plain that it was not directed exclusively against them. From the nature of the judgment, and from what is stated in the 13th verse, it is obvious that the people would necessarily participate in all the calamitous effects of that judgment. The judgment itself was, that the wisdom of their wise men should perish, and the understanding of their prudent men should be hid. But, in the preceding verse, it is said that the people were willing to be under the guidance of these wise men; for the fear which they had toward God, such as it was, was taught to them by the precept of men; and if the teachers, therefore, fell into ruinous error, the people must perish with them. The threatening, viewed in connection with other parts of Scripture, and especially with what we find in the writings of Isaiah himself, seems to intimate that the persons threatened were to be given up to judicial blindness of mind, whereby they would become incapable of being convinced by any evidence, or influenced by any remonstrance.

In this view, it corresponds with the commission given to Isaiah, when it was said to him, "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive

not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Similar, also, is the statement of the apostle in regard to an apostate church of later times, when he says, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." It is in this view of the judgment, considered as the infliction of God, that some suppose it is called "a marvellous work and a wonder." And assuredly it is a marvellous work, infinitely surpassing our comprehension, that the holy and righteous God, who hates sin, and will punish it, should, in perfect consistency with his own rectitude, and with the responsibility of sinners, exercise that almighty and mysterious power by which they are given over to hardened and hopeless impenitence. But the judgment may be called a marvellous work, or a wonder, considered in its own nature, inasmuch as those against whom it was threatened, and who brought it upon themselves, exhibited a blindness, and obstinacy, and unreasonableness, fitted to fill with amazement all who witnessed or have heard of it, even those who could not perceive their spiritual delinquency. The men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem set at nought the most solemn warnings, confirmed by immediate interpositions of divine power, not only towards their neighbours, the kingdom of Israel, but towards themselves, in the way both of deliverance and of punishment; and, in spite of them all, surrendered themselves to the influence of apostate kings and false prophets, till their infatuation terminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and their being themselves carried captive into a foreign land.

But still more marvellous was the blindness of the Jews in rejecting Christ, and continuing still to reject him as the Messiah promised to the fathers. The personal character of Jesus, the miracles which he wrought, the mighty works done by the apostles in his name, the rapid spread of the gospel among the heathen, the dispersion of the Jews themselves, and the fulfilment in all these of the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures, furnish evidence more than sufficient to convict, at least, and to condemn, if not to convince, every man who has read or heard them. But to the Jews themselves, who had a supersti-

tious reverence for their own Scriptures, and who were familiar with every prediction in them that referred to Christ, these evidences were so overwhelming, that no man, even an unbeliever, can fail to be amazed at the blindness which prevented them seeing in Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah foretold from the beginning. But the judgment here threatened has taken effect to a fearful extent also in the professedly Christian church, the church of Rome. In that church, pre-eminently, perhaps, above all churches, there have been taught for doctrines the commandments of men; and so successfully have her teachers taught, that they have outstripped all others in the demands which they have made on the credulity of her people. There is nothing however monstrous in itself, and however directly opposed to the Word of God, that they have not ventured to propound as of divine authority, for guiding the faith and practice of those who acknowledge them as spiritual guides. One might almost suppose that their chief object was to make the experiment of how far they might go in imposing upon their fellow-men, were it not that there is another and a very obvious reason for their ingenious perversion of the truth,—that of maintaining their authority over the consciences of men, and thereby securing their worldly aggrandisement.

But the melancholy fact is, that innumerable multitudes of perishing sinners believe these lies of the Man of Sin, not merely as if they were truths, but as really being the truths of God, and deliberately peril their immortal souls on what is as revolting to common sense, as it is dishonouring to divine truth. Many, I doubt not, have been delivered from the spiritual despotism of these blind guides, though they may not have outwardly disowned their authority. But far greater multitudes, it is to be feared, have lived and died the dupes of their soul-destroying system,—even multitudes who, on any other subject, would have discovered even a small portion of the fraud and deception which they allowed to be practised upon them on the infinitely momentous subject of their eternal interests. And what explanation, then, can be given of these deplorable facts, but that the wisdom of the wise man has failed, and the understanding of the prudent has been hid; and that they who have chosen these blind guides, and have been willing to receive for doctrines the

commandments of men, have been given to strong delusion to believe a lie?

There is, in the subject which we have now been considering, a very salutary admonition, and a very solemn warning to all. With regard to those who have hitherto been contented with just such a profession as is usually made by those around them, and who in reality, therefore, have been taught the fear of God only from the precept of men,—with regard to them I would observe, that, in the very nature of things, they must be at the mercy of those among whom they happen to live for what they are to believe as the ground of their hope for eternity. Whatever may be the truths which they now profess to believe,—even though they should be the very truths of God's Word,—they have received them not as his Word addressed to themselves personally, and requiring them to deal directly with God himself in deciding on the proposals which are there made to them, but because these truths have been inculcated upon them from infancy, and professedly believed by those with whom they have heretofore associated. But were they placed in circumstances where the most important of these truths are generally denied, or at least misunderstood or perverted, and where they find among the abettors of error those whom they are led to respect and esteem, it is obvious that they must gradually come to embrace the error, just as they originally adopted the truth, as a matter of opinion. And thus, in the very nature of things, in the ordinary course of events, the judgment threatened in the passage under consideration may at any time come upon mere formalists,—those who have a name to live, and are dead.

But we have no ground to suppose that it is only in this way, only in the ordinary course of things, that the threatening in the passage before us is carried into effect, through some change in the outward circumstances of men. If they are every day familiar with divine truth,—if they are constantly reading or hearing of Christ and his great salvation,—and if they are, from time to time, warned of the danger of formality, and urged to make sure of having closed with Christ, and accepted the overtures of mercy through him,—and yet, with all this, rest satisfied with merely professing to believe, or rather with ^{not} avowedly denying the gospel, and with observing its ^{self} ordinances, as a mere dis-

charge of a prescribed duty, and a decent compliance with an established practice,—then there is enough in Scripture, and even in the passage before us itself, to warrant us in warning them, that they may be left under the power of the delusion which they have so long cherished, so as to be no longer accessible to any argument or representation which would go to awaken them to a sense of their destitution and their danger, and would persuade them to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them. And there is here, also, a very solemn and salutary admonition, even to those who have more than a mere profession,—an admonition to beware of being on any point, or to any degree, seduced from the simplicity of the gospel.

Scripture and experience do both testify that any departure from the truth as it is in Jesus, however slight the error may appear to be, may lead believers themselves into perplexities, from which they will be delivered only after much humiliation and trouble. Even they are but too prone to receive for doctrines the commandments of men; and when once captivated with an ingenious speculation, which, to say the least of it, may be doubtful, they are in great danger of making the subject of that speculation the all in all of their religious creed, to the neglect of those great fundamental truths of the gospel, from the daily devout contemplation of which they must draw nourishment, if the divine life in their soul is to be sustained, and is to make progress towards maturity. Any thing that occupies a larger place in their hearts than these truths will tend to unsettle their minds, and render them liable to be carried about with every wind of doctrine; and if they should for a season be carried away so far as to render their return difficult, and painful, and perplexing, it is nothing more than they have been warned to expect, and nothing but what is necessary for them in the way of salutary chastisement. Let it be their great concern, then, to cherish an humble and teachable frame of spirit, earnestly seeking divine guidance in reading and hearing the Word,—bringing every thing which is presented to them as truth to the test of that Word,—looking with jealousy on every thing which pleases them, but which does not at the same time tend to humble and make them holy,—and making it their daily and most fervent prayer, that their “faith may not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

XII.

THE JOY OF THE RANSOMED.

ISAIAH XXXV. 10.

THE glorious description which forms the subject of this chapter is, of course, to be understood spiritually. In other words, it is a representation of the blessed effects of the gospel, under the figure of a wilderness clothed with luxuriant vegetation. Commentators are generally agreed in considering it as the prediction of a time of great prosperity to the Church, following upon the destruction of her enemies, as foretold in the preceding chapter, —a time when there was to be a very extended revival of true religion, after it had been well nigh overborne and extinguished. But though agreed in this general view of the subject, commentators differ greatly as to the precise period to which the prediction refers. It has been supposed, for example, to be a description of the state of the Church under the reign of Hezekiah, of the return of the Babylonish captivity, of the Christian dispensation generally, of the calling of the Gentiles, of the state of the Church after the fall of Antichrist, and of the state of future blessedness ; that is to say, each of these has been considered by some as the one only subject of the prediction. But this very diversity of application would seem to intimate that there is an error in attempting to limit to any one period in the history of the Church a description which, in its essential meaning, is applicable to many.

“No doubt,” says a very judicious commentator, “the true

account of this chapter is that which represents it as the description of a happy condition of the Church after a period of suffering. And when thus explained, it may be considered as including various particulars, none of which can be regarded as its specific or exclusive subject. It has been said that this prophecy was of course never fulfilled ; but so far is this from being true, that it has rather been fulfilled again and again. Without any change of its essential meaning, it may be applied to the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, to the vocation of the Gentiles, to the whole Christian dispensation, to the course of every individual believer, and to the blessedness of heaven. The ground of this manifold application is not that the language of the passage is unmeaning or indefinite ; but that there is a real and designed analogy between the various changes mentioned, which brings them all within the natural scope of the same inspired description." While I acquiesce in these remarks as sound and judicious, I regard them also as of great practical importance. We are too much accustomed, I suspect, in reading such passages as that before us, where a flourishing state of religion is foretold, to consider them as exclusively applicable to some future and distant period, when the Church, or believers generally, will exhibit a purity, and holiness, and unity which have not hitherto been manifested ; and while we thus understand such predictions, we are in danger of giving way to the feeling that we have no immediate personal interest in them ; as if it were not to be expected, and, therefore, were not necessary that we should aspire to those high attainments in holiness which these predictions set forth.

No doubt, the passage before us, and others of the same kind, may and do refer to future times, and times more glorious than any we have yet seen ; and we may rejoice in the thought that such times will come, as every believer must do. But if we do not regard such passages as admitting of a nearer and more immediate application to ourselves, we are losing, in a great measure, the benefit of the instruction, and the reproof, and the encouragement which they are fitted and designed to impart. And should we not look for the fulfilment of the prediction before us even in our own time ? For what will that fulfilment be, what will it consist in, even when it takes place in the latter day, and in its utmost extent of meaning ? Will it not just be the con-

version of a greater multitude of souls unto God, and increased holiness of character in those who are so converted? Are we forbidden, then, to expect either the one or the other of these in our own time, and that to a greater extent than we have yet witnessed? Are we not encouraged to expect both? And when they do take place, to whatever extent it may be, do we not witness to that extent the fulfilment of the prophet's prediction? The change which takes place in the conversion of the sinner, and in the growing holiness of the believer, is essentially the subject of the glorious description here recorded; and the passage before us, therefore, is a standing promise, addressed to God's people of all times, that however low the state of religion may at any period be, it will assuredly revive, and it may be in their own day, so that they may always be encouraged to pray, and labour, and hope, and expect that "the wilderness and the solitary place may be glad," and that "the desert may rejoice, and blossom as the rose."

Such, I think, is the view which we ought to take of the passage generally. And if so, then the verse we are at present considering, whatever may be its application to future and distant times, is descriptive of the true Church, or believers generally of all times. It is, indeed, a very glorious description of them and of their privileges to say that they are "the ransomed of the Lord," and that they "return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads;" that they obtain "joy and gladness," and that "sorrow and sighing shall flee away;" nor is there any state of glory and blessedness of which such language would not be a full and adequate description. And yet the language is not too strong to be employed in setting forth the privileges which are common to all believers even in this present life, though, from the weakness of their faith, and the remaining corruption of their nature, they may not always be in the actual possession of all the joy, and peace, and comfort which ought to accompany such privileges. If the view which we have taken of the passage generally be correct, then it is as true of believers now, as it can be of believers at any future period, that they are partakers of all the blessings here set forth. And in confirmation of that view, I may refer to the authority of the apostle, who, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, employs the very language of this passage

in reckoning up the privileges of which they had been put in possession, in consequence of their conversion to the faith of the Gospel: "For ye are not come," says he, "unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest. . . . But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Such was the state of honour, and dignity, and privilege into which the apostle says the believing Hebrews were brought by their conversion to the faith of the gospel; and surely it was a state in which they might and ought to have been filled with joy, even a joy unspeakable and full of glory. In point of fact they might not be so; for they might not fully realise their state and their privileges. And, indeed, it appears, from the manner in which the apostle addresses them in other parts of the same epistle, that they were prone to be cast down and discouraged,—that their faith was at times weak and ready to fail,—and that they were in danger of being moved away from the hope of the gospel. Still, if they were true believers, their condition and privileges were such as the apostle described, so that abundant provision was made for enabling them to rejoice always. And abundant provision is still made for all believers, even all "the ransomed of the Lord," returning and coming to Zion "with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads."

And, first, the very title by which believers are here denominated does very expressively intimate that a change has taken place in their condition, the most momentous in itself, and the most glorious in its consequences, and fitted, therefore, to awaken the liveliest joy and gladness. They are called "the ransomed of the Lord." The expression implies that they were in a state of bondage, and that the Lord, or Jehovah himself, had paid their ransom, or the price of their deliverance. And such was indeed their state. They were, like others, under a sentence of condemnation. Divine justice had a demand upon them, which they could not meet and answer,—a demand not only of perfect

obedience in all time coming, but of satisfaction for sins already committed. That demand could not be relinquished. If it was right in God to declare that sin must be punished, it was impossible that he could retract, and say that the punishment would not be inflicted. God could not deny himself. All men, therefore, as sinners, were under the sentence of the divine law, and by that sentence were bound over to the endurance of the penalty which the law pronounced on transgressors. They were thus under a bondage from which it was as impossible for them to escape, unless the penalty were paid, as it was impossible for God to change. His law, being the expression of his holy and righteous will, is immutable, and could not therefore remit, or even mitigate the punishment which it had denounced against sin,—even the punishment of death in the largest and most comprehensive meaning of that word, involving eternal banishment from the favour and the fellowship of God. God might pity sinners in this state of miserable bondage. But mere pity could not release them from the hold which divine justice had on them, unless that justice were fully satisfied,—that is, unless the penalty due to them were inflicted and endured even unto the uttermost. Multitudes, I fear, have no better or surer ground of hope for eternity than some vague idea that this pity or compassion of God will prevent him executing what he has threatened against sin,—an idea which implies that the holy, righteous, and unchangeable God, the great Lawgiver and Judge, can say and unsay as poor, feeble, fluctuating men are wont to do. It is a miserable delusion. The divine law cannot remit its sentence, cannot set free those whom it has bound over to the endurance of the threatened penalty, unless that penalty be inflicted, so as fully to pay the ransom of their deliverance.

Such, then, was the condition of all men. They were bound up in a prison-house from which there was no release, but on a condition which they had neither the will nor the power to fulfil,—namely, that of satisfying divine justice for the guilt already contracted, and yielding a perfect obedience to the divine law for the time that was to come. But hopeless and wretched as this condition was in the view which we have now taken of it, we have not seen all its misery. Being under the displeasure of God, lying under the curse of a broken law, men were cut off from all

communion with God, from any thing like a gracious communication from him to their souls. And what could be the effect of this separation from the fountain of light, and life, and blessedness, but that they must necessarily be under the reigning power of sin, the dominion of the prince of darkness, the influence of the great enemy of truth and righteousness, by whom they had at first been seduced? And so the Scriptures testify concerning them; for there it is declared of men in their unregenerate state, that they are "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them,"—that they are enemies to God in their heart by wicked works,—that they are "the servants of sin," and under the power of Satan, being "taken captive by him at his will." And thus, besides being under the condemning sentence of the divine law, they were in a state of willing captivity to the power of sin and Satan,—a captivity from which nothing but a divine power could deliver them, or even make them willing to be delivered. But this power could not be put forth on their behalf, unless satisfaction were made to the demands of divine justice; for no gracious communication could come from God to their soul, unless provision were first made for the payment of that penalty which the divine law declared to be due for sin, and which, if exacted of them, must have been their utter and eternal ruin.

But how was this penalty to be otherwise paid? Where else but in their punishment was this satisfaction to divine justice to be found? The marvellous answer to this question came from God himself, the offended Lawgiver and Judge, "Deliver . . . from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom." And the ransom has been paid. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And Christ willingly undertook all that was needful to accomplish the Father's gracious purpose. He consented to stand in the room of the guilty, and to be dealt with as they deserved to be. He became man, and dwelt among men, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," and at last poured out "his soul an offering for sin, giving his life a ransom for many." And having thus redeemed his people from the curse of the law by being made a curse for them,—having satisfied to the uttermost the

demands of divine justice on their behalf, magnifying the law, and making it honourable,—he made provision also for opening up again that gracious communication between God and men which their guilt had shut, and which could never otherwise have been renewed, that so they might not only be set free from that sentence by which they were bound over to the infliction of the penalty which they had incurred, but delivered also, by the Spirit's gracious work on their heart, from the power of sin and Satan, to which they were willing captives. How truly, then, and how appropriately, are they here called "the ransomed of the Lord!" It was God himself, the great Lawgiver, who in his infinite love and wisdom found out a way by which they might be redeemed. It was Christ, the Lord from heaven, who bought them with a price, even his own precious blood. And it was the Lord, the Spirit, who persuaded and enabled them to embrace Jesus Christ, and thus gave them experimentally to feel, that they have been translated out of darkness and bondage into the light and liberty of the sons of God. And when they contemplate, then, the momentous nature of the change which their condition has undergone, and when they think of what was required to bring it about, how should they be filled with admiration and gratitude! and how appropriately might they not adopt the language of this same prophet: "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel!"

And is it not a reasonable thing to expect that the ransomed of the Lord should thus praise him? "Rejoice in the Lord," says the psalmist, "O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright." The apostle, too, has said, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." The Scriptures, indeed, are full of such animating and encouraging admonitions; and the passage we are considering virtually declares that it may and ought always to be so with God's redeemed people, the ransomed of the Lord; for it says that they "shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads." Let us inquire, then, what is meant by returning and coming to Zion. And I observe, generally, that it signifies returning to God, and seeking

fellowship or communion with him, and especially through the Church,—that is, in the ordinances which God has appointed in his Church, and in which he has promised in a peculiar manner to meet with and to bless his people. Till they were convinced of their guilt, and misery, and helplessness, and were persuaded to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them, they had no desire for any thing like close and intimate communion with God,—nay, they knew not what communion with God meant; or if they had any idea of it, it was to them a distasteful and offensive thing,—the last thing in the world in which they would have sought or have expected happiness. But being turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, they begin to feel that his favour is life, and that his loving-kindness is better than life. Formerly, the spirit of bondage filled them with slavish dread, and, therefore, with dislike, when they thought seriously of God. But this spirit being removed, and the spirit of adoption being in some measure awakened in their hearts, it becomes their desire, as it was formerly their dislike, to have God much in their thoughts, not only by acknowledging his bounty in all the blessings which they enjoy, and recognising his hand in all the events which befall them, but also in holding real and intimate intercourse with him, coming boldly unto the throne of grace, that they “may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” This they seek in private and family prayer, in reading the Scriptures themselves, and such expositions as may help them to understand the Scriptures, and in devout meditation on what they read. But, in an especial manner, they seek to be near God, and to realise his presence in the public ordinances of the gospel,—in meeting with those whom, in Christian charity, they believe to be Christians,—assemblies of the saints,—joining with them in devotional exercises,—hearing the preaching of the Word,—and commemorating together the death of Him to whom they are indebted for the mighty deliverance which has been wrought for them.

It is, then, in the observance of these public ordinances that they may be especially said to come to Zion. And the reason must be very obvious to all who are even moderately acquainted with the Scriptures. Mount Zion, from the time that David carried the ark of God thither, and especially after Solomon built the

temple there, was distinguished above all other places; and the word Zion was used to denote the Church,—the people of God collectively,—because it was mount Zion that God did in a peculiar manner choose to put his name and worship there, and because thither the tribes went up, “the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord.” But the name “Zion” is given to the Church under the new dispensation also, as appears from the passage already referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews; and, indeed, many of the glorious things which we find spoken of Zion in the Old Testament must have referred to the Church in gospel times, inasmuch as they have not yet been fully realised. And the name Zion, as thus given to the Church, the whole body of God’s people, is alike appropriate and full of meaning. It was in mount Zion and Jerusalem that God was pleased, in a peculiar manner, to manifest himself in his majesty and greatness, making it the dwelling-place of his glory, and giving intimations and tokens of his presence there. It was there that he accepted the sacrifices and burnt-offerings of his people, and made to them communications of his will for their guidance, or their comfort, or their reproof. God was thus known and worshipped in Zion, as he was nowhere else known and worshipped. There his presence was felt, his favour was manifested, and his protecting power was exercised, as they had never been elsewhere; and Zion was thus secure against all enemies from without; for God himself was in the midst of her.

And how true is all this, and in a still larger sense, of the Church? It is in and through the Church that God has been pleased especially to reveal the glory of his character, as at once the just God and the Saviour; for “now,” says the apostle, “unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places” has been made known “by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.” It is in the Church that God has taken up his abode in another manner than anywhere else: for Christ has said of his Church, or people generally, that he will be with them always, “even unto the end of the world;” and of each individual believer he has said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” It is to the Church alone that God reveals or

makes himself known really and savingly; and it is by the Church only that any acceptable worship is offered to him; for an ungodly and unbelieving world can neither discern his glory, nor pay him any homage that he can accept. Though God is everywhere present, and everywhere exercises his providential care over the works of his hands, yet his presence is in a peculiar manner felt, and his protection experienced in the Church; for Christ has promised to his people individually, that he will send the Spirit, the Comforter, who will abide with them; and he has, moreover, declared that where two or three are met together in his name, he will be in the midst of them. And though, like Zion of old, the Church has often been,—nay, is continually assailed by Satan and an ungodly world,—yet she has not been, and never can be, overthrown; for she is founded upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.

This, then, is the Zion concerning which it is said, in a higher sense than it could have been said of the visible mount Zion and Jerusalem, “The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.” And this is the Zion to which the ransomed of the Lord come. From the moment they closed with Christ, and, through him, returned to God in penitence and faith, they became united to this holy community,—they ceased to be “strangers and foreigners,” and became “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Formerly, while they were without Christ, they were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now, in Christ Jesus,” they “who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” They have become members of that great family of which the true Church on earth is but a branch, a small portion; for they are come, not only “unto mount Zion, . . . the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” but also to “an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made per-

fect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." Such is the goodly society, the holy community, into which the ransomed of the Lord are introduced, from the moment they are united to Christ by a living faith. But they need much to qualify them for the full enjoyment of that society; and this they will seek and find in the ordinances of divine grace, especially in those public ordinances in which God's people are encouraged to expect that they will be admitted to hold communion with him, and with one another. In these ordinances especially they feel that they have come to Zion; for if in these ordinances they are admitted to hold fellowship "with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," they are in communion also with all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in truth and sincerity.

And if this be what is meant by the ransomed of the Lord coming to Zion, then might it not be expected that their coming would be with gladness, even with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads? Every thing connected with the change of condition which they have undergone is fitted to fill them with admiration, to awaken their gratitude, and to call forth the tribute of their thanksgiving and praise. It was thus with ransomed Judah of old, when they returned from Babylon, the land of their captivity, and came again to mount Zion, where God had formerly taken up his abode, and to Jerusalem, the city of the great King. In their journey from Babylon to Judea, they must have met with much to perplex and discourage them. The way was long, and it was beset with enemies who would willingly have arrested or retarded their progress. But by that time they had known, in their bitter experience, the difference between the service of God and the service of the heathen to whom they had been in bondage; and being delivered from that bondage, and having set out on their way to the land of their fathers, we cannot doubt that the hope of their ultimate arrival there would lighten the toil of their journey, and would soften to their eye the ruggedness of the land through which they passed, as if the wilderness and solitary place had been glad for them. And we know that when they did reach Zion, and laid again there the foundation of the house of the Lord, "They set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals to praise the Lord. . . . And they sang together by course in praising

and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid." No doubt there was, in the case of the ransomed captives of Judah, a great and a very palpable change in their outward circumstances; and as outward things, or the things of sense, do make a livelier impression than things that are spiritual and unseen, the joy and gladness of the restored captives of Judah might, to a considerable extent, be ascribed to this change in their external condition. But it can be as little doubted that, in regard to the truly penitent among those captives, the main source of their joy, and the main subject of their thanksgiving and praise, was the assurance or good hope that God was pacified towards them, that their sin was forgiven, and that the pledge of this forgiveness was their restoration to the land of their fathers, and, especially, to the enjoyment of the privileges which their fathers had formerly enjoyed in mount Zion. Though there had been no occasion, therefore, to call forth any outward expression of gratitude and gladness,—though they had returned to Zion in quietness, and proceeded even in solemn silence to rebuild the house of the Lord there,—still their sense of obligation, and the outpourings of their hearts in thanksgiving and praise, would have been the same; and it would have been emphatically true of them, that they returned and came to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads.

And ought not the same hope,—the hope that God is pacified towards them,—awaken the same joy, and call forth the same thanksgiving and praise in believers still? They, too, have known the service of sin to be bitter bondage, and they have in some measure known also the service of God to be the most perfect liberty. In making their escape from that bondage, they had perhaps a painful struggle to endure. The power of sin and Satan, to which they had been willing captives, was not broken in a moment. While a sense of guilt and danger convinced them of the necessity of fleeing from the wrath to come, their own corrupt heart would plead strongly in favour of some sinful gratification which it was unwilling to surrender, and the tempter would be ready to insinuate that it might be retained

without endangering their spiritual well-being. And even when delivered from this snare,—a snare in which, I fear, many, after being partially awakened, have been entangled to their eternal undoing,—even when they had escaped from this net, their struggle was not over. The same tempter, supported by their own unbelieving heart, would be ready to suggest that there was no peace for them,—that their sins were too many and too aggravated to be forgiven,—and that they were making themselves miserable for no purpose, labouring to attain what to them was unattainable. And under the depressing weight of these unbelieving suspicions, every thing in their present condition, as well as in their future prospects, might wear a gloomy and desolate aspect. Even the world, with all its allurements, would look like a wilderness. But they were not permitted to sink into despondency. Their hope, though very feeble, was not extinguished. They clung to the Saviour's gracious invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." While they dwelt on the compassion, love, and tenderness which that invitation breathes, their hope revived,—the hope of yet attaining to that rest; and as this hope became brighter, it changed the aspect of their condition, and of every thing around them,—the wilderness and the solitary place began to be glad for them. And if the very prospect of attaining to the rest which Christ promises to the weary and the heavy laden did thus sustain and cheer them while yet they were involved in much darkness, what should be their joy and gladness now that they have reached it, being in some measure put in possession of peace in believing? It is not meant, of course, to assert that this joy never can or never will be interrupted. It is said, indeed, that "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads." The joy is said to be upon their heads, in allusion to the practice of anointing the head with oil as a symbol of gladness; and it is said to be everlasting, or eternal, because it is spiritual joy imparted by the Holy Ghost, and therefore is eternal in its nature, and will be eternal in its duration.

But all this is perfectly compatible with its being interrupted, inasmuch as in this life it is at the best imperfect, and is liable, moreover, to be broken in upon both from within and from with-

out. Believers here are still encompassed with manifold infirmities, and they are never beyond the reach of temptation. The world still presents many objects fitted to engage their affections, and when these gain an undue ascendancy in their heart, the source of their joy will be in some measure shut up. They may not feel this while the world keeps faith with them,—that is, while it continues, in some good measure, to yield them the enjoyment which they have been tempted to seek in it. But the first worldly disappointment or affliction which overtakes them will disclose to them the loss which they have sustained, the sacrifice which they have made, in seeking more of their happiness in worldly things than it was befitting them to do. And even where there has been no such backsliding on their part, the afflictions with which God sees meet to visit them may be very painful and very trying,—so trying as greatly to disturb them in their spiritual exercises, and for a time greatly to mar their spiritual joy. But it ought not to be so with them. Abundant provision has been made for filling them with joy and peace, whatever their outward circumstances may be, if they are seeking to live up to their profession and privileges. And, accordingly, we find an inspired apostle, in addressing his afflicted fellow-believers, assuming, or taking for granted, that they were rejoicing greatly in the hope of Christ's salvation, even though, for a season, if God saw it needful, they might be in heaviness through manifold temptations. The ransomed of the Lord, while here, are still in a sinful world, with much sin cleaving to themselves; and they must, therefore, lay their account with having their share of all the ills which, under the government of a holy and righteous God, must attach to such a state. But did they remember, and seek habitually and vividly to realise, their privileges as the children of God, as members of his one great family in heaven and on earth, as fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God, they would feel that though living in a sinful world, where, in many respects, one thing happens unto all, yet their main interests lie beyond it; that though not outwardly and visibly separated from the world, they are nevertheless citizens of another, even a heavenly city; and that, amidst all the world's tribulations, they need never be without the enjoyment of everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.

XIII.

“COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE.”

ISAIAH XL. 1-31.

THE second part of the Book of Isaiah, which commences with this chapter, is supposed by some to have been written at a considerable distance of time from the close of the first part. But however this may be, every careful reader must have observed that the two portions are very different in their general scope and tenor. In the first part, the prophet deals largely in rebuke and threatening,—in the second, his communications are full of consolation and encouragement. In the first, he addresses the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, of his own time, in their national capacity, charging home upon them the apostasy and rebellion of which as a people they were guilty, and solemnly warning them of the judgments which, if they continued impenitent, would assuredly overtake them. In the second,—that is, from this chapter downward to the end of the book,—he speaks to and concerning the true Israel, the faithful remnant of believing men, assuring them that whatever disasters might befall the nation, the visible Church, God would remember his covenant with his true Church, and would fulfil every good word which his mouth had spoken concerning Zion; and that this assurance was designed for the Church,—the true people of God,—not of Isaiah's time only, but of all subsequent times, is evident from the fact, that the deliverances which he foretells, and the blessings which he promises, were future and

very distant. Of course, I do not mean to say that the whole of the first part of this book was addressed to Judah in their national capacity, and the whole of the second part to the true Church, the faithful remnant. Even in the first part, the prophet frequently speaks to the people of God; for the solemn rebukes and threatenings which are there addressed to the nation at large are interspersed with some of the clearest predictions of Christ, and the most animating promises of the prosperity of his kingdom, which are to be found in the Old Testament Scriptures. And, on the other hand, we find in the second part many a solemn representation of the backsliding and apostasy of Judah, as that which had brought upon them the terrible calamities under which the true Church, which outwardly participated in these calamities, needed to be sustained and comforted. Still there is ground for the distinction already stated between the general tenor of the first part of this book and that of the second. In the first, generally speaking, the prophet addresses Judah and Jerusalem in such a way as to imply that peradventure they might yet repent, and turn from their evil ways, and so avert the judgments which threatened them. But, in the second part, he speaks as if these judgments had been already executed; that is, he assumes that Judah, as a nation, would not repent, and, consequently, that the calamities which he had been commissioned to foretell, would assuredly overtake them. And assuming this,—knowing, in the spirit of prophecy, that it would infallibly be so, though it was yet future and distant,—he speaks as if all his former threatenings had actually been executed,—as if Jerusalem had been laid waste, and Judah carried into captivity,—and as if his main work, his great commission, now were to minister consolation and encouragement to the people of God, and to sustain their faith and hope under the tribulations which had come upon them: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

There was a very solemn warning to the men of Isaiah's own time in the promises of deliverance and enlargement which he was commissioned to deliver, inasmuch as these promises as-

sumed, as a thing infallibly certain, that great judgments were to come upon Judah and Jerusalem. But they were not left merely to infer this from the manner in which the prophet foretold deliverance. He had been previously commanded to announce to them, in the plainest terms, that Judah would one day be carried captive to Babylon, as we find recorded in the preceding chapter. There we are told that when king Hezekiah was recovered of his sickness, and when the king of Babylon sent messengers to him to congratulate him on his recovery, Hezekiah's heart was lifted up with pride, and he showed to the messengers "the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not." Whereupon the prophet Isaiah was sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." This was, perhaps, one of the most solemn, and might have been felt to be the most alarming of all the predictions which the prophet had uttered. It was not, you will observe, a conditional warning, as many of the other warnings of the prophet were; that is to say, it was not a threatening that a certain judgment would overtake them if they did not repent. It was an unqualified declaration that such and such an event should with absolute certainty take place, and could no more fail, therefore, of being fulfilled, than any other word of the unchangeable God. Nor is it to be considered merely as a declaration that Hezekiah's pride and forgetfulness of his dependence on God was to be punished in that particular way,—namely, by his posterity being carried away captive to Babylon. No doubt, Hezekiah's sin, like the sin of all Judah, was by that captivity to be visited with a manifestation of the divine displeasure; and it ought to have been, as I doubt not it was, a very painful and humbling thought to Hezekiah, that his sin contributed to the filling up of the measure of iniquity which

called down upon Jerusalem and Judah the righteous judgment of God. But Hezekiah's sin was not the cause, the sole cause of the solemn denunciation of the prophet, that all which he had showed to the Babylonish ambassadors should one day be carried to Babylon. It was rather the occasion which God was pleased to employ for announcing by his servant the prophet what, in his infinite wisdom and foreknowledge, he saw, that Judah would not repent, and turn to God, and be saved. It was a declaration that, notwithstanding all that had been done to convince them of their guilt and danger, they would go on in the frowardness of their own heart, till the wrath of God should come upon them to the uttermost. The prediction addressed to Hezekiah was thus a very appalling one. It was, in fact, a sentence of judgment, an irreversible sentence, by which Judah was bound over to the endurance of all the calamities that were to accompany and follow the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah. By those who were most deeply concerned in that judgment, the warning, of course, was disbelieved or unheeded. But to the prophet himself it must have been a very painful thing to give forth such an announcement. It was virtually commanding him to proclaim that all his former warnings and admonitions had gone for nothing,—nay, that they had served only to harden his countrymen in their sin, and that, instead of turning them from their infatuated course, as he laboured earnestly and affectionately to do, he had been the means of rendering them more blind and insensible to every consideration which ought to have awakened them to godly sorrow and repentance. It could not fail to recall to his remembrance the awful terms in which he received his commission as a prophet, "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not ; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes ; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Isaiah could not but feel that such was really the effect of all his labours, when he was commanded to go in to Hezekiah, and to announce to him, as a matter of absolute certainty, that his family and his people were one day to be carried captive to Babylon. And then what could the true people of God, the

faithful few who adhered to the worship of Jehovah, think of such a prediction? It was not a threatening addressed to an ungodly and apostate king, and at a time when the people were in open and flagrant rebellion against God, turning their back upon his house and his ordinances, and showing that they were mad upon their idols. Hezekiah was a godly king, who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; and by means of his example, and influence, and authority, there had been a great outward reformation among the people, and, also, as we cannot doubt, a considerable revival in the true Church. And yet it was in these very circumstances that the prophet announced, not as a judgment that would be inflicted if Judah and Jerusalem should again return to their idols, but as an event that was assuredly to take place, "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left." What must have been the dismay and the perplexity with which God's people heard such an announcement, at the very moment that they were rejoicing in the restoration of their spiritual privileges by Hezekiah, after having been for a season deprived of them by Ahaz, who had actually shut up the doors of the house of the Lord! With such a change as had taken place, not only in their own condition, in having free access to the house of God, but also in the outward character, at least, of the people at large, they must have been indulging the fond hope that better times had dawned upon Judah,—that God had again in mercy visited his people,—that the reformation which had begun would become permanent,—and that the Lord had turned from the fierceness of his anger wherewith the prophet had so often threatened them. How depressing, then, and discouraging to be told, as they were by the prediction referred to, that all this fair prospect was to be blasted,—that the goodly profession which Judah then made was to prove but as the morning cloud and the early dew,—and that the threatened judgment, though for a time delayed, was assuredly to be executed! Though none of that generation might live to witness or to participate in the calamities that were coming upon the land, yet their condition was hardly less painful and perplexing; nor did they stand less in need of being addressed in the words before us, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God."

Such appear to have been the circumstances in which the prophet entered on this second part of his work; and we can easily conceive with what joy and satisfaction he would address himself to that work. Long and anxiously had he laboured to turn Judah and Jerusalem from the evil of their ways, by threatening them with judgments, which it must have been painful to him to announce, and unspeakably more so when given to know that all his remonstrances and warnings had served only to harden the great body of his countrymen in their impenitence. How delightful, then, and how refreshing to his own soul, to be employed in ministering consolation and encouragement to the down-cast spirits of God's people, not only of that, but of all subsequent times, assuring them that, however dark and disastrous outward circumstances might be, God would prove to them the faithful and covenant-keeping God; and unfolding to them the sublimest views which inspired men had ever been honoured to disclose of the riches of redeeming grace and mercy, the glory of the person, and character, and work of the promised Messiah, and the advancement and final establishment of his kingdom! And, accordingly, he proceeds at once to assure the Church, that though Judah should be carried captive into Babylon, not only should that captivity come to an end, but it would prove one of the means whereby the true Church would ultimately be brought into a far more glorious state than ever she had before appeared in, even during the most prosperous period of the Old Testament economy. That captivity was one of the events which successively led to the final overthrow of the Jewish nation, and the loss of all their peculiar privileges; and the divine interpositions which were employed to repair, in part at least, that and similar disasters, were so many proofs to the people of God at the time that he had not forgotten them, and so many gracious intimations that a still more glorious deliverance awaited them. The prediction in the second verse was not only an assurance that the captivity of Babylon should come to an end, and furnish a new and striking manifestation of the power and faithfulness of God, but that all subsequent vicissitudes in the history of the Jewish nation would be overruled for the bringing in of that glorious dispensation, when a voice should be heard crying in the wilderness, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

This passage, it will be recollected, is expressly applied in the New Testament to the Baptist, as descriptive of his character and office as the forerunner of the Messiah. But the prophet speaks as if he himself heard it,—as if the whole of God's dealings with the Church were present to his view,—and as if he actually saw them all terminating in the glorious advent of Him in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed. Hence he speaks in the second verse as if the captivity of Judah had already terminated,—as if the chastisement with which God was to visit his people had produced the gracious effect which it was designed to do, so that their warfare was accomplished, and their iniquity pardoned, and they were receiving double blessings at the hand of God, notwithstanding of all their sins. It is thus that we find the prophet frequently or generally speaking. The divine revelations made to him in vision were so vivid, that he lived, so to speak, in the midst of the events which he foretold, and actually saw, as it were, the scenes which he described; and it is of great importance to bear this in mind in reading his prophecies. Here, then, he assures the Church that their protection amidst all dangers, and their deliverance from all calamities which threatened their overthrow, was as certain as if he actually witnessed it; and that though the great deliverance, of which all other deliverances were but types, was still distant, so that many generations of men, who are but as the grass that withereth, and as the flower thereof that fadeth, might pass away before it was accomplished, yet it was infallibly certain, as founded on the promise of Him who is unchangeable; for “the word of our God shall stand for ever.” Nay, at the 9th verse, the prophet speaks as if Zion, or the Church, might even then see the deliverer approaching, and might hail his coming as a strong one to destroy his enemies, and as the Shepherd of his people, watching over and caring for the feeblest of his flock.

But while the prophet did thus, in very emphatic language, set forth the certainty of the due fulfilment of all the divine promises to the Church, yet the people of God, in a season of darkness and depression, as they must have been in Isaiah's own time, when, to all appearance, there was no prospect of enlargement or relief, might still be ready to give way to desponding thoughts, and to ask how such a deliverance could be wrought

out in the face of so many obstacles, and in opposition to so many and such powerful adversaries. The prophet proceeds, therefore, at the 12th verse, in language the most expressive and sublime, to remind the Church of the majesty, power, and wisdom of Jehovah, as exercising an absolute sovereignty over all things in heaven and on earth, as disposing with almighty facility of every creature and of every event, and regarding as a very little thing,—nay, as less than nothing and vanity,—all that men reckon great and powerful. This, the prophet says, is the God whose word is pledged for the deliverance and protection of his Church,—the God who was to come with a strong hand, and whose arm was to rule for him,—whose reward was to be with him, and his work before him,—the God who was graciously to condescend to feed his flock like a shepherd, to gather the lambs with his arms and carry them in his bosom, and gently to lead those that are with young. And who were opposed to this great God and his Church? Dumb idols,—the molten graven images of the workman, spread over with the gold of the goldsmith, adorned with "silver chains,"—or a tree that will not soon rot, prepared by a cunning workman into a graven image. These are the gods that pretend to dispute with Jehovah the sovereignty of the world, and to defeat his purposes regarding his Church. With holy indignation, therefore, the prophet asks whether God's people can doubt His word for any thing that these idols can do, or for any thing that the votaries of these idols can do, even though they may be the kings and the great ones of the earth: "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in; that bringeth the princes to nothing: he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity." And, finally, the prophet bids the people of God contemplate the hosts of heaven as subject to Jehovah's control, and obedient to his command; and then asks whether the same power and the same almighty command was not adequate to the deliverance and protection of his people:

“Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?” And then he concludes with a renewed assurance to God’s people, that if they will trust him, they will find in their experience, both collectively and as individuals, that he will ever be a very present help in the time of trouble: “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall,”—that is, mere human strength at the best, and in all its vigour, will prove utter weakness and impotency: “but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.”

Such was the consolation, and the encouragement, and, I may add, the reproof which the prophet addressed to the Church of his own time, and of all times. And as it was designed, so it will be found applicable to the Church now, as it has ever been; for the Church still needs to be addressed in the words of the prophet, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.” I do not speak at present of believers in their individual capacity, and of their need personally of having consolation and comfort administered to them. Most will be ready enough to admit that in this sense the passage under consideration is applicable to them, and that they greatly need it. But if believers generally thought more about the prosperity of Christ’s cause, and less about their own individual and personal consolation than they do, they would see that, in their collective capacity as the Church, they greatly need also to be addressed in the consoling language of the prophet, and greatly need, moreover, to receive that language in faith, as well as with gratitude. Were they as feelingly alive as they should be to the glory of Christ, the extension of his kingdom, the salvation of souls, would they not see enough in the state of the world, and in the state of the visible Church itself, to awaken their deepest anxiety and concern? When they think of the many millions of the human race who are still sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, and of the countless multitudes who, even in the lands where the light of the gospel shines, are living without God and without hope in the world,—when they contemplate the abounding iniquity which characterises the very communities in which almost all profess to believe

the gospel,—and when they reflect how even those who, in Christian charity, may be considered the true Church of Christ, are separated from one another by the differences and jealousies which a worldly spirit generates,—do they not see enough to fill their hearts with sorrow, and to awaken the fear that, by some terrible judgments, God will vindicate his unacknowledged sovereignty and his despised gospel?

And independently altogether of such temporal judgments, such visible outpourings of the divine displeasure, and of their own participation therein, can they fail to lament a state of things so dishonouring to their God and Saviour, and so ruinous to the souls of men? Did they love Christ in any measure as they ought to love him, and did they love the souls of men for Christ's sake, would they not feel as deeply interested in the extension and prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom,—that is, in the ingathering of souls into his Church,—as ever the Jews of old did in the safety and prosperity of Jerusalem and Judah? and would they not look on times of flagrant ungodliness in the world, and of spiritual deadness in the Church, as the devout Jews did on the prevalence of idolatry and its bitter consequences in their time? And if the Church, if believers generally were thus deeply concerned about the glory of God and the good of their fellow-men, they would feel that, at this very moment, there is enough in the state of the world and of the Church to make them common mourners, as the Church in Isaiah's time were; and they would be glad to think that the prophet's consoling words were designed for them, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God."

The comfort here promised was not exhausted even when the voice was heard in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord," and when the messenger of the covenant actually appeared. Nor has it been exhausted yet. The Church, even in New Testament times, has never been in a condition in which she did not need to apply to this very portion of Scripture for consolation and comfort. But then, if the Church, the people of God, are really so deeply concerned about the prevalence of ungodliness, and the low state of religion in the Church itself, as to stand in need of the consoling assurance that God will yet make bare his holy arm on behalf of his own cause, they will feel that

they stand in need, also, of being reminded of all the considerations in the passage before us, to reassure their hearts and strengthen their faith in this divine interposition. When they look around them, they see a sight as formidable as Jerusalem of old saw, when the king of Assyria first, and the king of Babylon afterwards, encompassed it with his army. They see the powers that be, even in professedly Christian countries,—the great, and the mighty, and the noble,—all that lay claim to the character of liberal and enlightened men, taking part with infidelity, or with the man of sin, which is worse, if we are to judge by the doom pronounced upon both by the Word of God. And seeing this, they may feel as if it were hopeless to expect that the pure, the simple, the holy religion of the Bible, the truth as it is in Jesus, should ever be able to raise its head against such a combination of forces ; and especially a combination which professes all the while great respect for what they call Christianity, and an earnest desire to rescue it from the hands of men who, by their folly and fanaticism, would utterly ruin it.

In such circumstances, humble and simple-minded, and, it may be, timid believers in Christ may be ready to despond, and to become listless and inactive, as if it were in vain to think that they could ever make head against such formidable enemies. And what, then, can be more seasonable to them in the way of encouragement than to be reminded of the considerations here stated by the prophet,—that “the word of the Lord shall stand for ever ;” that “the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him ;” that “his reward,” both to foes and friends, “is with him, and his work before him ;” and that he will prove the protector and guide of his people,—the shepherd of his flock ? And if believers feel that they thus stand in need of all the encouragement which the prophet here addresses to the Church, they will acknowledge also that they may profit by the reproof which he administers ; for they must be aware that, even in their very anxiety to see the cause of Christ prosper, they have been but too prone to cast about for help in the wisdom and power of man,—reckoning on this and the other political event as likely to advance that cause,—trusting to the influence of political men for counteracting antichristian influence, and, it may be, betaking themselves to the crooked ways of worldly

policy for the purpose of securing the co-operation of such men. If they are conscious of having thus distrusted God, and of having placed an overweening confidence in men, how sharp to them should be the prophet's reproof, "To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers;" he "bringeth the princes to nothing: he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity."

But the passage before us is as encouraging and instructive to believers individually, in regard to their own personal comfort and spiritual consolation, as it is to the Church collectively, in regard to the interests of Christ's cause generally. Though the main subject of the prophet's address is the consolation of Zion, the comfort of God's people as a body, yet he does not forget or overlook the encouragement which is always needed by them individually; and he accordingly closes this section of his work with an assurance, which, though applicable to the Church at large, seems especially designed to strengthen the faith and revive the hope of God's people individually. At the same time, the very connection in which the encouraging promise at the close of the chapter is introduced, plainly intimates that the more deeply individual believers are interested about the advancement of Christ's cause and the prosperity of the Church at large, the better prepared will they be for deriving consolation to their own souls from the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel. And the experience of believers will enforce upon them this truth. They must be sensible that at no time are they more refreshed by these promises than when they have been led to take a deep interest in some object connected with the extension of Christ's kingdom, or when they have been awakened to a lively concern about the spiritual well-being even of a single individual of their brethren around them. I venture to say, that in proportion as they felt their hearts enlarged in love to others, and called forth in earnest prayer for them, in the same degree they felt enlargement in prayer for themselves.

Such, I think, is the ordination of God, as plainly taught in Scripture; and a beautiful ordination it is. If believers, then, would find consolation and comfort to their own souls, let them seek to cherish an affectionate concern for the souls of others.

This will not, indeed, prevent them from being sometimes sorrowful and cast down in spirit; for there will be seasons when they are ready to say, not in reference to the Church at large, but in reference to themselves, and to the state of their own minds on the subject of their personal salvation, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God;"—that is, My cause is forgotten, or given up,—the Lord hath cast me off. This is no unfrequent complaint in the mouth of God's professing people; and, on hearing it, we might be disposed to set about at once comforting such mourners, by telling them that they are judging too hardly of their own condition and character. But the Spirit of God, by the mouth of his prophet, has taught us that such persons need reproof first, and that consolation will follow. For his answer to their complaint is, in substance, that they were looking to their own resources, and relying on their own strength; and on finding that these were ready to fail them, they were, in faithlessness, disposed to conclude that the promise of God had failed, while the very purpose of their being left to feel their own weakness was to remind them of their sin and unbelief, as Judah and Jerusalem of old were reminded, when they went down to Egypt for help, but when the Egyptians helped them "in vain, and to no purpose." "Hast thou not known?" says the prophet, "hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding."

And having thus reproved believers for looking to themselves, when they should be looking to Him who has undertaken for them, and whose unsearchable understanding sees their best interests to be advanced by what appears to them only dark and disastrous, the prophet proceeds to comfort them by the assurance, that if they will but confide in Him who never faints and is never weary, they shall find, in their happy experience, that their very consciousness of their own infirmity and impotence will serve to make them more sensible of the power, and might, and faithfulness of him in whom they trust. The prophet's assurance, in fact, is in substance the very promise made many ages after to the apostle, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." The prophet's words

in the passage before us are, in fact, a commentary on the assurance given to the apostle,—a more full or enlarged statement of that promise,—telling believers that, whatever be their circumstances, whether tempted to doubt the grace and goodness of their heavenly Father, or ready to be overpowered in their conflict with sin, a believing look to him for help will assuredly bring them deliverance and enlargement. At every period of their course, their strength shall be as their day. Even in youth, while they have but just entered on the conflict, they may at times be faint. But he in whom they believe, who was foretold as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, will impart strength to them. And when in old age they feel that they are no longer able to think, and resolve, and conflict, as they once did,—even then he will never call them to any duty, either of doing or enduring, without renewing their strength for the service which he requires. “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

XIV.

"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE."

ISAIAH XLI. 1-29.

THIS chapter is a continuation of the preceding one, designed for the farther encouragement of God's people in the time of trouble, and giving them a new assurance of ultimate deliverance and enlargement. The prophet foresaw the calamities that were coming upon Judah as a nation, when they were to be carried captive into Babylon; and he had foretold that event in a way calculated very deeply to impress the true people of God, and to awaken the fear that they might be altogether cast off and forsaken.

But while it was thus given to the prophet to foresee the divine purposes of judgment towards Judah, not only in the Babylonish captivity, but in all the reverses that awaited them, there was also vouchsafed to him a revelation of God's purposes of mercy, in the deliverances which were to be wrought for them, not only in the restoration of the captivity of Babylon, but in all the interpositions which were to take place on their behalf, preserving them in their national capacity till the fulfilment of the great design of their original separation from the rest of the world,—the appearance of the promised Messiah. With this revelation of God's future dealings with Judah as a nation, there was also opened up to the prophet a very animating view of the manifestation of the divine love and faithfulness towards the true people of God, on whose account these dealings were determined on; and the communication to the

Church of what was thus revealed to the prophet of God's purposes of love and mercy, forms the main subject of the second part of this book,—namely, from the 40th chapter to the end. In the 40th chapter, the prophet introduces the subject in language the most consoling and encouraging, speaking not only as if all the calamities which he foresaw were coming upon Judah had actually overtaken them, but as if these calamities had been overpast,—as if the judgments of the Lord, so far as they were designed for chastening, had already produced the gracious effect which they were designed to produce,—and as if the promised deliverance were even then in the way of being wrought out. In fact, the prophet beheld in vision that deliverance as if it had been present. He lived, so to speak, in the midst of the events which he foretold, and he was as an eye-witness of the scenes which he described. This is characteristic, as I have already remarked, of the predictions, generally, of this second part of the Book of Isaiah ; and we must bear this in mind, if we would fully understand these predictions.

A remarkable illustration of these remarks occurs in the very opening of the 40th chapter. There the prophet announces the future deliverance of the Church as an event that had actually arrived, a thing at that moment present to and seen by him: "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Nor did this vision of the prophet, whereby the future appeared to him as present, extend only to the restoration of the Babylonish captivity, though that event did, no doubt, occupy a prominent place in the glorious spectacle which was presented to him. But he saw beyond that event ; for, in the 3d verse, he describes the character and office of the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah, and describes it as if he had himself heard the voice in the wilderness saying, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God,"—and as if he actually saw the advent of Him before whom "every valley shall yet be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." And having thus announced as a thing

infallibly certain,—as a thing which he actually saw,—the preservation of Judah in her national capacity, till the great deliverer should appear, notwithstanding all the disasters which might befall her in the interval before the deliverer came, the prophet proceeds to bring before the Church considerations fitted to remove the doubts which she might entertain respecting the fulfilment of such a glorious prediction, after all the calamities which the prophet foretold were to overtake her. He assures her that the prediction was the word of the God of Israel, and that while one generation of men after another might pass away like the grass that withereth and the flower that fadeth, that word of God should stand for ever. He reminds her that He whose word was thus pledged for her ultimate deliverance was the supreme ruler, the absolute sovereign of the universe, “before whom all nations were as nothing,”—yea, to whom they were counted “less than nothing, and vanity.” He asks her whether she could suppose that the idols and molten images, or their votaries, the heathen who trusted in them, could really overthrow the counsel or defeat the purpose of Jehovah. He bids her look up to the heavens, and see how all the hosts thereof were sustained and directed in their course by His mighty power; and then to reflect with what infinite facility he could overrule and direct the feeble efforts of men to the accomplishment of his own designs. He reproves her for giving way to despondency under a feeling of her own weakness, forgetting that God, even her God, “the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary.” And he closes the chapter with the gracious assurance, that they who waited upon the Lord should “renew their strength;” should “mount up with wings as eagles;” should “run and not be weary;” and should “walk and not faint.”

Such is the general argument of the 40th chapter; and in the chapter before us, the prophet proceeds still farther to comfort the Church with new assurances of God’s gracious purposes regarding her. The chapter begins with a solemn address by Jehovah himself to the heathen nations, the whole world of ungodly and idolatrous men, comprehended under the name “islands.” He summons them to keep silence,—that is, to listen or attend,—he calls upon them to renew their strength if they could, and then to speak,—to reason with him regarding their attempts to

defeat his purposes. He asks them who it was that raised up the righteous man from the east, and called him to his foot,—or, as the words have been rendered, who hath raised up from the east one whom righteousness, or the righteous one, called to his foot,—that is, called to be his servant,—gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings. It is generally understood, by the soundest commentators, that these words refer to a great deliverance that was to be brought to the people of God from the east, and especially by Cyrus, to whom we find a more direct reference, even by name, in a subsequent part of this book, and who is expressly named the Lord's servant, or one whom he called to his foot. But though that deliverance was still future and very distant, yet, for the reason already stated, it is here spoken of as already accomplished, in spite of all the efforts of the heathen and their gods to prevent it. Who was it, said Jehovah, who called this man from the east, and gave kings "as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow: He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet. Who hath wrought and done it? I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he." Then follows a description of the dismay which seized the heathen on witnessing the interposition of God on behalf of his people, and a representation of the vanity of idols, and their utter impotency to help their terrified votaries in their time of need,—a representation set forth in the language of mockery, somewhat similar to that in which Elijah, in a former age, addressed the infatuated votaries of Baal: "The isles saw it, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came. They helped every one his neighbour;—and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheneth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering: and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved."

We have here a very expressive commentary on the words of the psalmist, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." The true people of God, to whom Isaiah first delivered his message, must have been very deeply impressed with the miserable helplessness of idols and their votaries, when they heard this derisive rebuke, as if from

the mouth of God himself. And how precious, then, must have been to them the message which immediately followed, when, turning, as it were, from the heathen, Jehovah addressed his own people, saying, "But thou, Israel, art my servant; Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." The marvellous condescension of God in thus speaking of Abraham was itself fitted to overwhelm with admiration and gratitude all who really were Abraham's children, even independently of the love and tenderness expressed towards themselves as his spiritual seed. But the very introduction of Abraham's name was fitted also to revive and strengthen their confidence in God. It could not fail to remind them of the many wonderful things which God had done for them, and the many deliverances which he had wrought on their behalf, from the time of Abraham downward, showing from generation to generation that he had never forgotten his promise to the patriarch, "I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing." The mention of his name, then, was an appeal to the people of God whether he had not proved, through successive ages, and amidst the most grievous provocations, to be the faithful and covenant-keeping God,—nay, as fulfilling promises made to Abraham which his posterity had times without number forfeited. But to hear Abraham spoken of, as Jehovah here condescended to speak of him, and to be themselves addressed in connection with him, and as his seed, was fitted to dispel their unbelieving fears and gloomy forebodings, and to revive in all its strength their confidence in the unchangeable faithfulness of God. They were, indeed, even in Isaiah's time, very low, few in number, and cast down in spirit; and they were to be brought lower still, through manifold reverses which the prophet foretold awaited them. But there had been set before them the most sublime views of the majesty, power, and absolute sovereignty of Jehovah,—views which their whole former history illustrated and confirmed; and they had, at the same time, been reminded of what that history had also abundantly verified,—the impotency, the utter nothingness of idols, as opposed to God; and they could not doubt, therefore, either his power or faithfulness to accomplish all that he might promise. And then all this is followed up, in the 9th and following verses, with promises the most

explicit of God's unceasing care for them, and ultimately of deliverance from all their troubles : "Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away."

Nor are the promises merely of a general kind, assuring them of protection and relief. They are expressed in such a way as to show that he who promised was intimately acquainted with all the weaknesses and wants of those to whom he made the promises. Their own hearts must have told them, as the hearts of believers must tell them still, that he who graciously addressed them by the mouth of the prophet in these verses, knows well all the sources of their uneasiness,—their conscious weakness and sense of helplessness,—their dread of numerous, and powerful, and inveterate enemies,—their proneness to faint and be discouraged, because their conflict might be protracted,—everything, in fact, which they most feared, and which was most likely to engender feelings of doubt or unbelief. They felt that they had no strength to help or sustain themselves; but the Lord said, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." They were alarmed at the number and the inveteracy of their enemies; but the Lord said, "All they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded;"—"they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought." They were the objects of contempt and scorn to those around them; but Jehovah said, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; . . . behold, thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, . . . and the whirlwind shall scatter them,"—that is, every thing proud and lofty shall be humbled:—"and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel." And, finally, they were ever ready to become faint and weary, it might be from causes which they could not well explain; but for all such seasons of depression, they received the large and comprehensive promise, "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys:

I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." And having addressed these great and precious promises to his Church, Jehovah again summons the nations and their gods to come forth, and say what they can do; as if to give his people a still clearer proof of the vanity of these gods: "Produce your cause, saith the Lord: bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob." "Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we,"—that is, Jehovah and his people,— "that we may know that ye are gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together." To this challenge there is no answer: "For I beheld, and there was no man; even among them, and there was no counsellor, that, when I asked of them, could answer a word. Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion."

Such, as I understand it, is a brief summary of what is contained in this chapter. And it can hardly fail to occur to every one, that a very large portion of the chapter is taken up with the exposure of the impotency and the vanity of idols; and that the manner in which that impotency is exposed is peculiarly solemn and emphatic. Jehovah is himself represented as addressing, first, the heathen nations, and the idols or false gods whom they served; then, his own people, the true Israel; and then, again, the idolatrous nations and their molten images. He is, moreover, represented as summoning these gods, and the men who confided in them, to come forth in the presence of himself and his people, and to produce their proofs, if they had any, of their being gods, of their ever having previously foretold what had already happened, or of their being able to foretell now what is yet to take place. And having thus put them upon their trial in the presence of his Church, and making it plain to his own people that these false gods and their blinded votaries had not a word to answer for themselves, Jehovah is represented as pronouncing this final judgment, and as if appealing to his own people as witnesses of the trial and the rectitude of the decision, "Behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing; their molten images are wind and confusion." This very striking manner of exposing the folly, the absurdity, as well as the guilt of idolatry, was fitted to make a very deep impression on the

minds of the true Israel,—those who had remained true to the worship of the living God. And it was, therefore, a very gracious communication to the Church of that time. Idolatry was the prevailing sin of that age, as of others before and after it. It was fashionable. With few exceptions, and at long intervals, the kings of Judah were idolaters; and so, accordingly, were the nobles and great men, and in due time the priests and pretended prophets also,—the people, of course, following in their train. It was the form which ungodliness took in that time, and was, therefore, the most seductive even to the people of God,—that which required the largest measure of faith, and courage, and patience to resist, being countenanced and encouraged by all that was great, and dignified, and influential. It was a very affecting proof, then, of the grace and condescension of God towards his people, that he not only warned them, as he often did very solemnly, of the ruin which would one day overtake idolaters, but vouchsafed to set before them such a view of the folly of idolatry as to render it, if I may so speak, ridiculous and contemptible,—holding it up to their scorn and derision, as an absurdity which their common sense and understanding might be expected to condemn as revolting. And while they were thus taught how little the false gods of the nations could do either for or against them, their reverence for the true God, their confidence in his supremacy, and their reliance on his love and faithfulness, must have gathered strength.

There is enough, then, in God's gracious care for his people, to explain why it is that so much is said in this chapter to expose the false pretensions and to demonstrate the nothingness of false gods. But there was obviously another and a higher reason for making the subject of idolatry occupy so large and so prominent a place in this and in other portions of the prophet's writings,—a reason which ought especially to have operated on God's people in strengthening their faith in all his promises. It was for the purpose of intimating that God's own glory was concerned in fulfilling his promises to Abraham and to his seed, in spite of all that the nations and their false gods could do to defeat that fulfilment. These false gods, or rather their votaries, were maintaining a controversy, and waging war with Jehovah. They might have admitted him to be like one of themselves, and

might have acknowledged that Israel were at liberty, if they chose, to acknowledge and worship him as their God. But they disputed his supremacy,—they denied his absolute sovereignty,—they could not endure his claim to be the one only living and true God; and they set themselves, therefore, to disprove that claim, by vanquishing and bringing into subjection the people whom he had chosen for his own, and whom he had bound himself by solemn covenant to protect in the enjoyment of all the peculiar privileges with which he had invested them. It was by and for Israel, then, that God was pleased to manifest his power, to assert and vindicate his supremacy as the only true God; and so long as Israel trusted in him, and in him alone, he never failed to extort from the fears, at least, of the heathen, an acknowledgment that the God of Israel was a God against whom they could not stand. But Israel frequently revolted, forgetting or distrusting God, so that it became necessary that he should for a time forsake them, and give them up to the will of their enemies; and when this took place, it gave occasion to the heathen to allege that the God of Israel could not protect his own people. And herein lay the great guilt of the backsliding of Israel, inasmuch as, by the very punishment with which it was necessary to visit them, the name of God was profaned among the heathen. Still, however, it was made very plain, even to the nations themselves, that the disasters which befell Israel were owing to their own folly, not to any lack of power on the part of the God of Israel; for there was always a remnant for whom he made bare his holy arm in the sight of the heathen, and in whose preservation and deliverance he vindicated his supremacy as Jehovah, the self-existent, the only true and living God. And this was the security which the Church, the faithful remnant, had for the fulfilment of the precious promises in the passage before us, as well as of all the promises by which the hearts of God's faithful people were from time to time refreshed. In setting forth the impotency and vanity of idols, God pledged his faithfulness and truth that he would work out the deliverance of his people for his own great name's sake, that through them that name might be sanctified in the sight of the heathen.

And is not this still the main stay of the believer's faith and hope regarding the final triumph of the gospel? The supre-

macy of Christ, as king of Zion and king of nations, is just as much disputed by an ungodly world now, as the supremacy of Jehovah was by the heathen nations of old. Men, in their unregenerate state, still maintain a controversy, still wage war with God and his Church. That controversy may have been modified by the altered circumstances and by the ever-changing opinions and customs of men, and it may, therefore, have assumed a somewhat different form from that of the controversy between the nations and Israel of old. But it is essentially the same in its character, because human nature, till regenerated by the Holy Spirit, is essentially the same, however various the circumstances in which it may be placed, or the modifications which it may undergo, and God is unchangeable, the same pure, and holy, and righteous Being, against whom the carnal mind from the beginning has been enmity. The controversy, therefore, is still maintained, the warfare is still waged by an ungodly world against the claims and the cause of Christ, and though it may not always or very frequently break out in open violence against his people, for the avowed purpose of extirpating them, and so extinguishing the truth, yet the great adversary finds weapons in abundance wherewith to carry on that war. The pleasures of sin, the ingenious speculations of philosophy, falsely so called, and plausible perversions of the truth itself, may often prove more dangerous, even to believers themselves, than open persecution would be. And when we reflect how, by one or other of such artifices, countless multitudes of all ranks and degrees of men, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, are retained in their natural state of alienation from God, or rather are confirmed and hardened in their hostility to him, nothing, humanly speaking, will appear to us more hopeless than that mankind at large, or even any great proportion of them, should ever be brought to submit to Christ, to acknowledge him as Lord and King, to become the meek, and humble, and lowly subjects of his government, imbibing his spirit, and walking in his footsteps.

When we further reflect that the only instrumentality which has been appointed for effecting such a marvellous change on the innumerable multitudes now leagued in rebellion against Christ, consists in the feeble efforts of those who are themselves reclaimed rebels, and who on that very account have become

offensive to those whom they would seek to reclaim, the idea of that change being ever brought about may appear still more hopeless, and the believer might be ready to surrender himself to this feeling of hopelessness, and relax, or altogether abandon, even the efforts which he might make.

It is true, there are great and precious promises given to sustain and encourage him. It is the peculiar honour and privilege of the Church, Christ's redeemed people, that they should be employed as instruments in maintaining his cause, and extending his kingdom in the world; and many are the assurances which they have received, that they shall triumph in the conflict to which they have been called. But when the individual believer reflects how frequently the Church of old, the people of God, forfeited the fulfilment of similar promises, and lost for a season the commanding influence which it was their honour and their privilege to exercise over the nations around them, he may be in danger of giving way to the doubt, especially at those seasons when the state of religion is low, whether the Church, the people of God now, may not, in like manner, forfeit the honour and privilege conferred on them, and by their backsliding, by their unfaithfulness to the trust committed to them, may lose all right to look for success in the efforts which they do make, and all confidence in asking that success. And what, then, will revive the hope and reassure the heart of the believer in such a season of depression? What but the very consideration which the prophet presented to the Church of old, when he assured her that God's own glory was concerned in the fulfilment of all the promises which he had given to his people? It is so still. The honour of the Redeemer himself is inseparably connected with the honour which it is his good pleasure to bestow upon his people, in making them the instruments of establishing his kingdom in the world. The ultimate success of the great enterprise on which he has sent them can no more fail than he can lose his mediatorial crown; and this is the consideration that will especially revive and call forth the zeal of his people, even in circumstances outwardly the most discouraging. Their activity, and diligence, and cheerfulness in the Lord's work will be in proportion to the liveliness of their faith in the great truth, that by them and with them he works for his great name's sake.

It appears, then, that the considerations addressed by the prophet to the people of God of that day, for their consolation and encouragement, are as precious, because they are as applicable, now as they were then, in so far as the Church at large is concerned. But the remark, it is obvious, must hold equally true in regard to individuals. Nobody can doubt that when Jehovah condescended to speak to his people collectively, in the consoling language here recorded, each of them would apply or appropriate it to himself personally, not only as promising a deliverance common to all, but as applicable to his own spiritual condition and experience, feeling that the language addressed to him did most faithfully set forth his weaknesses and wants, and also that it did most graciously promise what he was conscious he needed. So it must have been, for example, with respect to the gracious assurance in the 10th verse, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." This was addressed to the Church, the true Church, as a body, in a season of great depression; and it could not fail to be a faithful representation of the state of every depressed believer. And how rich, then, in consolation must it have been to each individually, even independently of the promise which it held out of preservation and deliverance to the Church at large! And how full of comfort to the afflicted believer still, who is borne down with a depressing sense of his weakness,—who feels that his spiritual enemies are too many and too great for him,—who has to contend with unbelief and the remaining power of sin from within, as well as sore trial and temptation from without,—who is peculiarly exposed, as the believer in such a condition will always be, to the assaults of the great adversary,—and who is thus brought to the very point, as it were, of giving up the conflict in despair! It is to such a one that the language before us is addressed; and many such, I doubt not, can bear witness how truly that language sets forth the workings of fear and doubt in their minds. The assurance, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee," is no doubt very precious.

But to a soul so depressed and discouraged, it would be too general a statement to bring immediate relief. The objection,

however, is anticipated; for it is added, "Be not dismayed; for I am thy God." This assurance comprehends every thing that is needful for the support and comfort of the soul, and ought to dissipate every unbelieving fear and doubt. Yet, even with all this, such may be, and such, I doubt not, has been the prevalence of unbelief in the mind, even of a child of God, that he might long to have some more specific promise as to the manner in which he was to experience the presence of his God. And this desire is granted; for Jehovah says, "I will strengthen thee." But the depressed soul may say, I am not capable of receiving strength in sufficient measure or abundance to maintain the conflict with my spiritual enemies. This difficulty, too, is anticipated and met; for it is said, "Yea, I will help thee." And then, lest this should seem to leave something still depending on the believer himself, so long as he was only strengthened and helped, it is finally added that Jehovah will undertake for him altogether: "Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." I cannot help thinking that the purpose of this most wonderful statement was to assure God's people that He who condescended to address them in such language was intimately acquainted with all their soul exercises, with all their doubts and fears, with all their unreasonable and unbelieving suspicions, and with all the horrible suggestions which the great adversary did at such seasons present to their minds, and that the language of the passage before us was framed so as directly to meet and to resolve all these doubts. And what more could compassion, and love, and tenderness say to quiet the apprehension, and revive the faith, and reassure the heart of the unbeliever, especially when followed up by another, and not a less precious promise: "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water."

The former promise assured believers of the presence of God, as their God, to strengthen, yea, to help, yea, to uphold them, by the right hand of his righteousness, against all enemies from without who might plot their overthrow, either by seducing or

terrifying them into a relinquishment of their profession and their principles. And the promise last quoted is an assurance that provision is made for their support and consolation under the less obvious but not less depressing trials to which they may be subjected,—trials not common to them with the Church at large in their own day, but arising out of their own peculiar condition,—the state of their health, their worldly circumstances, and all those private concerns which may tend at times greatly to discourage their heart and mar their spiritual comfort. Under such trials they may feel weary and thirsty; and not the less so that their fellow-men can neither appreciate nor in any sensible degree alleviate their suffering. But God, even their God, knows and can estimate it all, and will not fail to impart to them the refreshing influences of his Spirit, proving to them as “rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” But let believers never forget that God has given these promises, and will fulfil them, for his name’s sake and his glory’s sake; and the more anxious, therefore, that they are for the advancement of that glory, the establishment of the Redeemer’s kingdom, the more confidently may they reckon on the fulfilment of the promise to their own souls, “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground.”

XV.

THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH.

ISAIAH XLII. 1-25.

THE servant of Jehovah, spoken of at the beginning of this chapter, is undoubtedly Christ; for we find this prediction repeatedly alluded to, and, on one occasion at least, expressly quoted in the New Testament, in direct reference to him. In the preceding chapter, the prophet records what had been revealed to him in vision of a great deliverance which was to be wrought for Judah, by one who was to be raised up and called from the East,—even Cyrus, who was to restore the captivity of Babylon; and to this promise of deliverance from that special calamity he adds many other promises, applicable to the people of God in all times of trouble. But in the chapter before us, the vision of the prophet extends forward to a far more distant period, and to a deliverance of which the restoration of Judah from Babylon was but a type,—even to the coming of Him who was not only “to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the desolations of Israel,” but was to be “a light to the Gentiles,” and “salvation to the ends of the earth.” And the manner in which this glorious person is introduced is very emphatic. The prophet speaks as if that person was then actually revealed or exhibited: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold;” or, as it has been rendered, “Behold my servant! I uphold him.” It is Jehovah himself who thus speaks by the mouth of his prophet. But the language put into the prophet’s mouth implied that he himself

beheld in vision the glorious person whom he foretold, as he appears to have seen every thing else of which he prophesied in these latter chapters of his work. And I need hardly remark, that such a mode of expressing himself was fitted to make a very deep impression on the people of God to whom the prophet addressed himself, and who believed that he was a prophet, inasmuch as he spoke to them with all the certainty and confidence of one who was, as it were, an eye-witness of all that he foretold.

Having, then, thus called the attention of the Church to the great deliverer, Jehovah's servant and chosen one, as if he were introduced and really present to them, the prophet proceeds to delineate his character, to explain the nature of his office; and to describe the manner in which that office was to be executed.

And with respect to the character of Christ, as set forth in the first four verses, it is assuredly described with a vividness which might have been expected in a description by one who had actually seen Christ in the flesh; for none, I think, who are familiar with the gospel history, can read these verses without instantly recognising Him whose history the evangelists wrote, even the meek and lowly Jesus, exercising not only a divine tenderness towards the humble, afflicted, and broken-hearted penitent, but a divine forbearance and compassion, also, even towards the bitterest of the many enemies who sought his life. As to his office, the great work which he was to accomplish, that is very briefly, but very comprehensively, stated in the 4th verse: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law,"—that is, till he has placed the true religion, or a spiritual kingdom, in the earth; and the isles,—that is, the Gentile nations generally,—shall wait,—shall not be brought to the knowledge of the truth till his law reach them. And all this was to be accomplished without noise, or violence, or force.

But here the question might occur, how was it possible that one so meek and lowly should ever achieve such glorious things, —should put down the turbulence and rebellion of an ungodly world, and bring it into subjection to his holy spiritual authority? The people of God might be ready to entertain some such question; and it is answered by the assurance that Jehovah himself,

the self-existent, the only true God, had chosen and appointed his servant for the accomplishment of that work; and that it could no more fail, therefore, than idols could usurp the authority and power of the living God: "Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the Lord have called thee in righteousness,"—for the vindication of my righteousness,—“and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people,”—that is, for the dispenser or mediator of a covenant with them,—“for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house. I am Jehovah: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” And for the farther assurance of the people of God, that all these glorious things would be achieved, they are reminded of former predictions which had been duly fulfilled, and which were so many pledges, therefore, that every new promise would in like manner be carried into effect: “Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.” Then follows a description, in highly figurative language, of the great and glorious changes which were to take place, when the servant of Jehovah should have finished his work,—changes as palpably the doing of the Lord as if the whole aspect of nature were altered; and the description concludes with the precious promise, “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not: I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”

From this glorious prediction of Christ and his kingdom, occasion is taken to address, first, the Gentiles, the idolatrous nations, warning them of the ruin in which their idolatry would involve them, and calling upon them to open their eyes and ears to the truth; and then the Jews, who are charged with being still more deaf and blind than even the Gentiles: “Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord’s servant?” That by the

servant of the Lord we are here to understand the Jewish people, as distinguished from the other nations, cannot be doubted. They are so denominated on various other occasions by the same prophet. Thus, in the immediately preceding chapter, it is said, "Thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen." And in the immediately following chapter they are thus addressed, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen."

It may appear, indeed, at first, as if there were something unsuitable in applying to Israel and Judah, when they were to be rebuked for their unfaithfulness and backsliding, the very title which, in the first verse of this chapter, is in a peculiar sense given to Christ. But a little reflection is sufficient to convince us, that on no occasion could this title have been more appropriately applied to that people than on the occasion before us. For in what sense was Israel the servant of the Lord? The verse before us explains that, when it calls them the messenger whom God sent. They were separated from the rest of the world, not exclusively, or even mainly, for their own individual benefit. They were selected to be witnesses for God against an idolatrous world, to demonstrate his being, and to assert and vindicate his supremacy, in opposition to the claims of the false gods of the nations; and for this high and holy vocation, this honourable mission from God to a guilty world, they were fully furnished and equipped. They were in possession of a divine revelation, the truths of which they were called to maintain at all times and in all places,—truths which denounced idolatry as rebellion against the only living and true God. They had a divinely appointed system of religious worship, which they were required to preserve in all its integrity and purity, and which held up a most intelligible and solemn testimony against all the abominations of idol worship. A land which was the glory of all lands, a land flowing with milk and honey, was selected for their inheritance. The miraculous manner in which they were put in possession of that land was an announcement to all the nations around them, that they were placed there to testify against and to oppose idolatry. And not only was a divine power pledged to keep them there, but while they were steadfast in God's covenant, that power never failed to be forthcoming, to

sustain their high and honourable character as God's chosen people, whom he had selected, that they might be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory in the earth. They were thus, as a nation, God's messenger to the other nations, and as such they were perfect, inasmuch as they were thoroughly and completely furnished with all that was needful for executing the mission on which they were sent. And if they had been faithful, countless multitudes, for any thing they knew, might have been turned from dumb idols to serve the living God. As it was, we know that many were so turned.

Israel then might be denominated the servant of Jehovah, in the same sense in which that title is given to Messiah himself. Christ, indeed, is in the highest, and in a peculiar sense, the servant of Jehovah. But in all ages, his Church, his people, his body, have been fellow-workers with him in the mission on which he was sent, the instruments which he employs for carrying into effect the objects of that mission. And so, accordingly, as we have seen, Israel is called by the honourable title of "Jehovah's servant." But that title is very appropriately applied to them on the same occasion on which it is applied to Christ, when the object of addressing them was to reprove them for their unfaithfulness, inasmuch as it set before them the guilt of that unfaithfulness in all its aggravation, reminding them in a very emphatic manner of the honour which they had forfeited, and the privileges which they had lost by failing to fulfil the vocation to which they were appointed, the mission on which they had been sent. They had been appointed to open the eyes of the Gentiles, the idolatrous nations, to the evils and abominations of idolatry ; but instead of doing so, they had become more blind than those whom they were sent to enlighten. "Who is blind, but my servant?" In the preceding verse, the Gentiles had been addressed as deaf and blind. When it is added, therefore, "Who is blind, but my servant?" it was virtually saying, Yea, blinder is my servant still. "Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect,"—he that was thoroughly furnished with the means of enlightening others,—“and who is blind as,” or in the same degree as, “the Lord’s servant? Seeing many things,” having a clear revelation of Jehovah’s will, “but thou observest

not; opening the ears," that is, appointed for the very purpose of opening the ears of others, "but he heareth not;" he who had received God's truth for the purpose of proclaiming it to others was himself deaf to it.

In these verses, as in other passages, Israel are sometimes spoken to, and sometimes spoken of; and, in both cases, they are represented as a single individual, as constituting, in their national or collective capacity, one person. Hence the terms "thou" and "he" are applied to them. But while Jehovah thus rebuked his chosen people for their unfaithfulness, and that, too, in language the sharpest and most severe, because it set forth the marvellous grace and kindness which they had abused and despised; yet the purpose for which Israel had been selected and set apart from the rest of the world was not to be defeated. Though they had not been faithful,—though, instead of testifying for God against dumb and blind idols, they had themselves become blind,—yet God would not permit his own institution to be utterly overthrown without accomplishing the great purpose which was designed by it. Israel, as his visible Church, and as containing within it his true Church, was his own institute, appointed to represent Christ, and to act for him before he appeared, and to prepare the way for his appearing; and though Israel, to a great extent, betrayed their trust, and failed to fulfil their mission, yet God's purpose was not on that account to be defeated. For his own righteousness' sake, therefore, and for magnifying and making honourable his own ordinance, even his law, which he had committed to the keeping of his chosen people, he was pleased to preserve them in their separate and distinct condition from other nations, notwithstanding their grievous backslidings, until He should come who was emphatically Jehovah's servant, and by whom the wisdom of all God's previous appointments was to be fully vindicated: "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable."

But, in the meantime, God's unfaithful and backsliding people must be visited with marks of his displeasure which could not be mistaken. They had ceased, as a nation or people, to hold up the light of divine truth, amidst the darkness of the nations around them; and so they were robbed and spoiled of their

glory,—they were themselves involved in darkness,—they were snared in holes, and hid in prison-houses,—they were for a prey, and none delivered,—they were for a spoil, and none said, Restore. All this was true of Judah and Jerusalem in the days of the prophet, as well as at subsequent periods of their history; and being thus reminded of the cause of all the calamities which had actually come upon them, or were still threatened, they are then admonished to hear the warning voice which had been addressed to them, that so, by penitence and turning to God, they might escape coming and still more terrible tribulations: “Who among you will give ear to this? who will hearken and hear for the time to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him,”—that is, the nation spoken of as one individual,—“therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart.”

This chapter, as I have now endeavoured very briefly to expound it, presents two leading subjects for our consideration. The first is Christ in his person, character, and work. The second is Christ's body, the Church, his redeemed people, and the place which they occupy in reference to the accomplishment of his work,—that is, the part which they are appointed and expected to take in that work, and their responsibility for the fulfilment of the part assigned to them. To both of these subjects I have already referred in general terms; but it may not be uninteresting to consider them a little more particularly.

And, first, let us consider the view which is here presented to us of Christ. He is set forth to our contemplation by Jehovah himself, God the Father, the great Lawgiver and Judge, who describes him as his servant whom he upheld, his elect or chosen one, in whom his soul delighted. This, of course, was spoken of Christ in his mediatorial character, and in reference to his mediatorial work, and implied, therefore, not only that he was inconceivably dear to the Father as his eternal and only begotten Son, but dear to him also as having undertaken to carry into effect the Father's gracious purpose of saving sinners. And thus

we are reminded here, as we frequently are in other passages of Scripture, that the plan of man's redemption originated in the grace and compassion of the Father, who "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten and well beloved Son, that whosoever believeth on him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life." And, accordingly, when Christ actually appeared, the language which was here addressed to him in prophecy was repeated concerning him in an audible voice from heaven, when it was once and again said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

And then as to the personal character of Christ, the view which is here given of him has, I may venture to say, imparted unspeakable consolation to God's people, especially to mourners in Zion, the downcast and sorrowful in spirit, from the day that the prediction was first uttered till the present hour. It is here said of Christ, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench; he shall bring forth judgment unto truth." These words are usually understood as referring to the tenderness with which Christ deals with the humble, contrite, and broken-hearted penitent, who, under an oppressing sense of his unworthiness, is ready to sink into despondency. And to such a one they are assuredly fitted to convey abundant consolation and encouragement. But the words are not spoken, I think, with an exclusive reference to the Saviour's treatment of sorrowing and spiritually afflicted penitents, and, on this very account, they will be found fitted still more largely to impart comfort to those who really are spiritual mourners. In the 12th chapter of Matthew's gospel, we have a commentary on the passage before us, which throws great light on its meaning. There we are informed that, on a certain Sabbath, Jesus, while teaching in the synagogue, healed a man who had a withered hand, and that "the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and charged them" that followed him, "that they should not make him known: That it might be fulfilled," says the evangelist, "which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my

soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory." Here the prediction of the prophet is declared to have been fulfilled or exemplified in Jesus withdrawing himself from his enemies, rather than meet their premature attempts against his life, by an exercise of power which might have crushed them. These enemies were to him but as a bruised reed which is easily broken, or as smoking flax which might quickly be extinguished. But "the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." So he acted on the occasion referred to by the evangelist; and so he did on another occasion, when his disciples would have called down fire from heaven, to consume the Samaritan village which refused to receive him, and when he replied to them in the words which I have just quoted. And if such was the forbearance, and compassion, and long-suffering which he exercised, even towards those who not only rejected him, but who sought to destroy him, with what confidence may not the humble and the contrite look to him,—those who have felt their need of his salvation, and have been made willing to accept it! and how unworthily do they think of him, if they doubt whether he be willing that they should forthwith enter upon and enjoy that rest which he promises to the weary and the heavy laden!

But though the view here given of the character and work of Christ was no doubt designed, as well as fitted to minister consolation and encouragement to individuals, at once rebuking and removing their unbelieving fears, yet the main design of the passage obviously is, I think, to set forth the manner in which he was to establish his kingdom. From the beginning Christ had been foretold as a conqueror and a king; and from the time of David downward, we find this title very frequently given to him. His conquests, too, and his kingly power and authority, are often set forth in the language in which men are wont to speak of the conquests and the glory of earthly kings. Not only was it foretold of him that he should sit on the throne of his father David, and "reign over the house of Jacob for ever;" but that he

should have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession,—that his kingdom should extend from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth,—that they who dwell in the wilderness should bow before him, and his enemies should lick the dust,—that the kings of Tarshish and the isles should bring presents; and the kings of Sheba and Seba should offer gifts,—yea, that all kings should fall down before him, and all nations should serve him.

But though Christ and his kingdom were thus spoken of in language with which men were familiar, as applicable to the conquests and the government of a mighty and invincible potentate, and though the Church was thus assured that no created power could arrest or hinder the extension and final establishment of Messiah's kingdom; yet there were other predictions, of which that in the passage before us is one, wherein that kingdom, both as to its nature and as to the manner of its erection, is represented not only as differing from, but as standing in striking contrast to the kingdoms of the world. It had been described in language applicable to earthly kingdoms, for the purpose of declaring that while its establishment was infallibly certain, inasmuch as the God of heaven himself was to set it up, it was also to exceed all others in extent and glory, inasmuch as all other kings would one day bow and do homage to Messiah. But in the prediction before us, and in others of a similar kind, the glory of Christ's kingdom is represented as altogether of a different kind from that of earthly kingdoms. And what could more emphatically express this than the description here given of Christ, and of the manner in which he was to proceed in establishing an universal government in the earth; for what can be conceived more unlike a description of a conquering earthly king than to say, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench?" Yet meek, and quiet, and peaceful, he shall go forth conquering and to conquer, and shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. The kingdom which he is establishing is not a kingdom of this world, nor cometh it with observation. It is the reign of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, established in the heart and conscience, through the knowledge and belief of the truth.

And until this truth reaches men, whatever be the earthly kingdoms to which they belong or the privileges which they enjoy, they are blind and in a prison-house, sitting in darkness. From this state of spiritual darkness and bondage earthly kings cannot deliver their subjects, whatever other kind of liberty they may bestow. He only whom God has given to be Mediator between himself and a guilty world, and to be the light of the nations, can "open the blind eyes," and "bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house." He only can "bring the blind by a way that they knew not," and "lead them in paths that they have not known;" he only can "make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

And have we experienced the enlargement and the liberty which Christ gives to all who become the subjects of his spiritual government? If we have, as we all professedly hope that we have, in professing to be Christians, then must we not be watching with deep interest the progress of that kingdom in the ingathering of others of our enslaved fellow-men into it? To say nothing at present of the part which we may take, or are required to take, in publishing that truth by means of which the conquests of Messiah are to be won, might it not be expected that we should be looking with profound interest on the extension of that spiritual liberty which we ourselves enjoy?

But the advancement of Messiah's cause is not merely a subject on which we may and ought to dwell with earnest desire and joyful expectation. We are reminded by the passage before us, that the Church,—Christ's people,—stand in a very honourable relation to him in reference to the advancement of his kingdom, inasmuch as a part has been assigned to them in the great work which he is carrying on; and, therefore, a heavy responsibility attaches to them for the performance of that part. So it was, as we have seen, with the Church in Old Testament times. The people of God then were appointed witnesses for him. As a nation separated from all others,—the one nation with whom God held direct and immediate communication,—they were his messengers sent to an idolatrous world, to assert and to furnish proofs of his supremacy, and to demonstrate the vanity of idols. And because of this their high and holy voca-

tion, and the honourable mission on which they were sent, they were called the servants of Jehovah.

And such is the relation in which the Church, the people of God, still stand to him under the New Testament dispensation. As the Church of old was employed in Christ's work before he appeared, so he employs his Church still, now that he has returned to the Father,—with this difference, that the Church of New Testament times has received a wider and larger commission than the Church formerly had. Christ's people are required not only to testify for him to all around them, as Israel did, and to receive into their fellowship all who profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him, but they are expressly commanded to "go into all the world," and to "preach the gospel to every creature."

XVI.

GOD'S MERCIES AND ISRAEL'S BACKSLIDINGS.

ISAIAH XLIII. 1-28.

THIS chapter, taken in connection with the preceding, furnishes an example of what frequently occurs in the writings of the prophets,—namely, warnings and encouragements, or threatenings of judgment and promises of deliverance, closely following on one another. At the conclusion of the preceding chapter, Jehovah is represented as having given Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers,—as having poured upon them the fury of his anger and the strength of battle; while Jacob nevertheless remained insensible to the fire that was kindled around him, and was wasting him away. This, of course, was a prediction of judgment still to come; but so certainly would it come, that the prophet spoke of it as already inflicted, and of the continued impenitence, for a season at least, of the people under it, as if that too had been actually manifested. Those who stood most in need of the warning were, of course, those who would give the least heed to it,—that is, the great majority of Judah and Jerusalem; and we find, accordingly, in their subsequent history, proofs in abundance both that the threatened judgment did overtake them, and that the nation at large remained long impenitent notwithstanding,—consuming under it, but not laying it to heart,—till it was executed in all its severity, in their being carried captive into a foreign land. But there were others besides them, who did lay to heart all that the prophet threat-

ened and foretold in the way of judgment; and to them that judgment might appear to imply that God was finally and for ever to cast off his people. It was necessary, therefore, for keeping alive their faith and hope, that the threatenings which would otherwise have overwhelmed them should be followed by promises,—by predictions of the gracious interpositions which were still in reserve for God's people.

These promises or predictions did not imply either that the threatened calamities would not overtake Judah, or that even true believers themselves would escape sharing in them. There was no such hope held out to them; and so we find that, when the judgment was executed in the captivity which took place in the reign of Jehoiakim, Daniel and his godly companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, were among the captives, and were carried to Babylon, as well as the most rebellious and impenitent of Judah and Jerusalem. But the Church, God's true people, were assured that though these judgments would certainly be executed, yet the Lord would not thereby for ever cast off his people. And this assurance implied, not only that they who had been faithful amidst the general defection, or who should in their affliction turn to God in penitence and faith, would be individually cared for, and continue to enjoy tokens of his favour, but that the people should be preserved in their national capacity, whatever disasters might befall them, until the great object was accomplished for which they had been originally chosen and separated from all the nations of the earth. That great object was the advent of Messiah, the coming of Him in whom it was promised to Abraham that all the families of the earth were to be blessed. This was not only the secret design, but the revealed purpose of God, concerning Israel; for the whole tenor of Scripture, from the time of Abraham downward, plainly intimated that the appearing of the promised Saviour was to be inseparably connected with the existence of Abraham's family as a distinct nation or people.

The Church, then, must have believed that that glorious event could take place only in connection with the permanency of the patriarch's descendants in a national capacity, and latterly with the maintenance of the kingdom which had been established in the house of David; and, therefore, any judgment which threat-

ened to subvert that kingdom, and to disperse Judah beyond the possibility of being again gathered, would go directly to involve the true people of God in darkness and despondency concerning the coming of Him to whom from the beginning the faith and hope of the Church had been directed. How desolate, then, and utterly bereft of comfort must they have been, if, while told of the calamities that were coming upon the nation, even to the extent of being carried captive among the heathen, they had not been assured at the same time that God would again visit and redeem them ! and how marvellous the grace of God in the care that was taken to keep alive their faith and hope, by not only assuring them of a certain restoration to the land of their fathers, but giving them new and more enlarged views than had been before given of the glory of Him who was to sit on the throne of his father David, and to reign over the house of Israel and Judah for ever !

It is on this principle, then, that we are to explain why it is that there is in the writings of the prophets, and especially of Isaiah, a succession of threatenings so severe, and of promises so precious, that the fulfilment of the one might appear incompatible with the execution of the other. Yet both were to be accomplished in all their extent. Israel, as a people, did grievously decline and backslide ; and, therefore, the terrible calamities with which the prophet threatened them became unavoidable. - The vindication of the divine rectitude required that these calamities should be inflicted. But, notwithstanding all this, Israel were still precious in the sight of God, even in their national capacity ; not only because there were always to be found among them a faithful few at least, who constituted the true Church of God in the earth, but because by Israel or Judah, in their national capacity, God had graciously purposed to provide for the accomplishment of a work which was very precious in his sight,—even the manifestation of his Son in the flesh for the salvation of sinners ; and till this work was accomplished, they would still be the objects of his special care and protection, whatever might be the judgments with which he saw it necessary to visit their iniquities. Their continued existence as a kingdom—a separate people—was precious to him, because he had bound them up with the brightest manifestation of his own glory, as the only living and

true God, and especially as the just God and the Saviour. Hence the large and precious promises contained in the first four verses of this chapter, following immediately on the solemn and sure prediction of judgments at the close of the preceding: "But now,"—now that ye are brought to the very verge of utter and irretrievable ruin by your own apostasy and rebellion,—“now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

Of course, it was only the faithful remnant,—true believers in Judah and Jerusalem,—that would derive any consolation from these promises, as they only would be alarmed and humbled by the threatenings of the prophet. The people at large believed neither the one nor the other. But this was no reason why the sovereign grace of God towards them as a nation should not be set forth, or why his gracious purposes by and towards them as a nation still should not be declared, when the true Church so greatly needed such a declaration to prevent them sinking into utter despondency. And, accordingly, the people are reminded that at the first other nations had been given for them, and that at the expense of other nations they would be ransomed again: “For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.” Though they might be,—nay, though they assuredly were to be scattered among the heathen,—yet not only would they return again, but other nations should one day be gathered to them: “Fear not; for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

This language, I think, cannot be considered as referring only

to the return of Judah from Babylon. It obviously extends beyond that period,—even to gospel times, and to the ingathering of the Gentiles. But it was through the instrumentality of Israel as a nation that provision was to be made for this glorious event; for, in the 8th and following verses, they are represented as witnesses for God, to open the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf, even of the nations, that they might see, and understand, and believe that Jehovah is the only true God, and that beside him there is no Saviour. As one of the proofs of this, the supremacy of the God of Israel, reference is made to the future deliverance of his people from Babylon, spoken of as a thing already done: “For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships.” And this deliverance again is illustrated, and its certainty confirmed, by what Israel had formerly experienced in their deliverance from Egypt: “Thus saith the Lord, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters,”—as was done in the Red Sea,—“which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; They shall lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinct, they are quenched as tow.” But glorious as were these manifestations of the divine power and faithfulness, the time was coming when they would not be remembered or considered, because of the surpassing glory of what God was yet to do for his Church: “Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing: now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.”

In all these great and wonderful things, Israel as a nation were deeply concerned; for it was through Israel that preparation was to be made for bringing them about. But they never would have been brought about if they had been conditionally suspended on the faithfulness of Israel to the trust committed to them; for instead of walking worthy of their high and holy vocation as the witnesses for God against idolatry, and diligently prosecuting their great mission as messengers sent by him to

assert his supremacy in the sight of the heathen, their conduct, at many periods of their history, was such as to defeat the very purpose for which they had been so peculiarly distinguished. But that purpose was not to be defeated even by their perverseness. And this is very emphatically asserted in the passage before us; for after an unqualified promise that God would do by and for Israel far more glorious things than he had yet done, there follows a most impressive and affecting complaint of the ingratitude and disobedience with which they had requited all that he had done for them in the time that was past, and of the indifference and distrust with which they treated all that he threatened or promised to do in future: "But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast brought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices; but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." And were they still, therefore, to be the object of his regard? was there still in reserve for them a new and a yet more glorious display of his power, not only by them, but on their behalf? Yes; and the reason is given, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance; let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified;" that is, declare and establish, if thou canst, any plea of thine own whereon thou mayest be justified,—a strong assertion of their inexcusable guilt, on account of which the threatened judgments would assuredly overtake them. "Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches."

The prominent subject in this chapter is the exhibition of the sovereignty and the riches of divine grace, as exemplified in God's dealings with Israel from the first to the last. I say exemplified; for the marvellous history of that people was but an example or specimen of that grace to which we must ascribe every blessing which any of the sinful children of men have ever

experienced. That Israel were indebted to free grace for all that distinguished them from others, is a truth which hardly needs any illustration. They were selected before they were born, to be in a peculiar sense the people of the Lord ; and this selection was not merely a purpose in the mind of God, but was a revealed purpose, the subject of a promise given to Abraham,—nay, of a covenant sealed and confirmed to him while he was yet childless. Israel were thus chosen before they had done either good or evil, and, therefore, before they could establish any claim to be preferred to the other nations of the earth. And so far from any such claim on their part being foreseen as the reason or ground of their election, they were chosen in the perfect foreknowledge, on the part of God, of all the waywardness, rebellion, perverseness, and unbelief, which their history exhibits, and which is so strikingly presented in the passage before us. When God swore to Abraham that he would give to him and his seed the land of Canaan for a possession for ever,—that is, till the second part of the promise was provided for, namely, in the coming of Him in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed ;—when God promised all this to Abraham, and confirmed his promise by an oath, he did so, perfectly foreseeing all the provocation which he would endure at the hand of Israel, and all the forbearance, and compassion, and long-suffering which he would be required to exercise towards them, if his promise to the patriarch was to be carried into effect. It was for nothing, therefore, foreknown or foreseen in them, in the way of merit, that they were selected from among the nations to be honoured and privileged as they were, for they were from the beginning a stiff-necked and rebellious people. But, on the other hand, there is no reason to suppose that they were worse than other nations, or essentially different from the rest of mankind. No doubt, the guilt of their ungodliness, and the sin of their idolatry, as often as they fell into it, was greatly aggravated, because of the peculiar privileges which they enjoyed. They had never been left without at least a traditionary revelation of the true God, confirmed from time to time by renewed interpositions in their favour, whereby he bore testimony to his being, perfections, and sovereignty ; and from an early period they had a written record of his will, unfolding the most sublime views of his character,

and furnishing the fullest instructions as to the worship and obedience which he required of them.

When we reflect, then, on the care that was thus taken to make them acquainted with the true God, to teach them, by actual experience, the peace, and security, and happiness of serving and obeying him, and to demonstrate, by the judgments which they were themselves employed to execute upon the heathen, the folly as well as the guilt of idolatry,—and when we find that, notwithstanding all this, they were ever prone to forsake God, and to exchange his pure and holy service for the worship of dumb idols,—we might be disposed, perhaps, to conclude that instead of being naturally better, they were worse than the rest of the world, and that they manifested a perverseness and an obstinacy of will which did not characterise the other nations. But we have no ground for such a conclusion. We have no reason to suppose that any other family or nation on earth, if placed in the same circumstances with Israel, would have acted differently from what Israel did. Indeed, we have evidence to the contrary; for with what infatuated obstinacy did the nations of Canaan cling to their false gods, and continue to defy and conflict with the Israelites, notwithstanding such demonstrations of the impotency of their own idols, and of the almighty power of the God of Israel, as were sufficient to overwhelm, and did frequently overwhelm them in terror and dismay! And the solemn charge, too, which was frequently laid upon Israel, to beware of forming any alliance with these nations, because, if they did so, they would assuredly be drawn into idolatry, was the direct testimony of God himself, that every nation was alike guilty and alienated from him.

The sovereignty of divine grace, then, was manifested, not merely in selecting the people of Israel upon whom to bestow special favour and privileges, but in choosing any family or nation whatever for such a purpose; and every individual, therefore, who participates in the spiritual blessings which were tendered to them, is as much a debtor to free and sovereign grace as they were. And, indeed, it was not for themselves only, or even mainly, that Israel were chosen from among the nations, and honoured with the title of God's peculiar people. It was by that choice that God was pleased, for his own glory, to provide for the execution

of his great purpose of mercy, even to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. The promise made to Abraham was not the exclusive property of his descendants,—his children according to the flesh. All the families of the earth had a share in that promise, in so far as the blessings conveyed in it are spiritual and enduring ; for in Christ they are all one day to be blessed. All, therefore, who have participated in these blessings, were personally interested in that sovereign act of grace whereby God chose Israel for his portion, Jacob for the lot of his inheritance. One of the purposes of that act was to provide for bringing them, even all true believers, into the state in which they now are. While they contemplate, therefore, the free grace, the undeserved mercy, manifested towards Israel, they ought to regard that grace and mercy as exercised towards themselves personally ; and while they are disposed to wonder at the forbearance and long-suffering patience which that people experienced, they ought to remember that for their sakes too, who were as undeserving as Israel could be, this forbearance was exercised, that in due time, according to God's sovereign purpose, they might be called, as they have been, into the fellowship of his Son, and so be "begotten again . . . to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

And if the sovereignty of divine grace was thus strikingly exemplified in the calling of Abraham and the election of his family, so the history of God's dealings with them does as strikingly illustrate the riches of that grace. For what but a divine patience could have endured the provocation and folly which God did endure at the hand of Israel ? What but a divine purpose could have secured the fulfilment of promises, which they to whom they were made did every day forfeit by their disobedience and rebellion ? None, I think, can read without astonishment the history of Israel, which is essentially the history of all men, when they think, on the one hand, of the daring rebellion against God's plainly revealed will, and the insolent contempt of his mercy, manifested by that people ; and on the other, of the continued interpositions of divine power on their behalf, preserving or delivering them from the consequences of their own folly and sin, and in spite of themselves,—carrying into full effect all the gracious promises which were designed to win them over

to the love and service of God. Did we not bear in mind that God wrought for his own name's sake, we might indeed well wonder why he did not utterly cast them off, and with them all the nations of the earth, of all generations, even the whole human race; for Israel were just what other men were.

But though we know that, for his name's sake, and for his glory's sake, and not for any merit in Israel, or in any of the human race, God wrought towards that people as he did, still his forbearance and sparing mercy, notwithstanding their perverseness and provocation, ought to be the subject of our most profound admiration. So it has been represented by God himself; for it is recorded that on more than one occasion the Lord said unto Moses, "How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they." And what had Moses to say to this just and righteous sentence?—what had he to plead in arrest of its execution? Not one word on the ground of any thing in Israel that could excuse, or even palliate their guilt; and he attempted no such plea. He had no argument and no petition but an appeal to God's own glory, and to the faithfulness of God's own promises; and these he did plead with great, with amazing boldness. "Then," said he, "the Egyptians shall hear it, . . . and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou, Lord, art among this people; that thou, Lord, art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them; and that thou goest before them, by day-time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness." Moses remembered, also, the name and the memorial by which God was made known to him when he stood in a cleft of the rock on mount Sinai, while the Lord passed by; and he pleaded that name for the pardon of Israel, great and aggravated as their guilt was: "Now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy,

forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now. And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word."

In this solemn interview, we have a very striking illustration of the sovereign, abounding grace of God,—an assertion, in a very emphatic form, of the great truth that salvation is altogether of grace,—a truth which it is most salutary to contemplate, because it is the truth which exalts God and humbles man. And the same truth is very impressively brought before us in this chapter, where Israel are plainly told that if the grace of God had not been unbounded, the glorious plan which had been formed for their redemption would have been abandoned, and every promise which had been made to them, being forfeited on their part, would have been left unfulfilled. The very promises here recorded, great and precious as they were, are promises of deliverance from the calamities which they had brought upon themselves. If they passed through the waters, it was because their transgressions required to be visited with affliction. But God would not leave them to be overwhelmed in the flood. If they passed through the fire, it was because it was needful to convince them that they had incurred his displeasure. But he would not utterly consume them in the fierceness of his anger. And then look at the complaint which, amidst all these promises, is made of their continued insensibility and heartless ingratitude,—their forgetfulness of Him who had already done such great things for them, and had pledged his faithfulness to work still more glorious wonders on their behalf: "But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel." And what might have been expected to follow such a complaint as this? What was to be done with a people whom no judgments could restrain from sin, and no mercies win over to obedience? What but to leave them to reap the fruit of their own doings, and to be filled with their own devices? If they were weary of God,—weary of Him who had borne so long and so patiently with them, never failing to deliver them when they cried to

him, and often interposing for them when they asked him not, but were looking for enlargement from another quarter,—what was to be expected but that he should become weary of them, and cast them off for ever? And so it would have been if his ways were our ways, or his thoughts our thoughts. But as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts. His abounding grace for the manifestation of his own glory stood between them and ruin; and the explanation of all the divine dealings with Israel is given in a single sentence,—“I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

Believers, I think, may find much salutary instruction, and, it may be, reproof, in thus contemplating God's dealings with Israel, as the plan of procedure which he was pleased to adopt to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. Viewing that procedure as a part of the history of redemption, a plan of the divine devising, preparatory to and inseparably connected with the appearing of the promised Saviour, every believer must perceive that it was a plan which did nearly concern him personally; and it ought to be both interesting and profitable to him seriously to contemplate the perverseness and obstinacy with which men resisted the execution of that plan, and the divine forbearance, compassion, and sparing mercy that was exercised in carrying it into effect. It presents a very humbling view of fallen man; for Israel was just a specimen of mankind generally in their fallen state. It exhibits men opposing with determined obstinacy, and seeking to defeat in every possible way, the plan which divine grace and wisdom has devised for their recovery from sin and misery,—their deliverance from eternal death. This infatuated rejection of God's gracious proposals was peculiarly marked in the character and conduct of Israel, because they were selected to occupy a very prominent place,—because they were called upon either to acknowledge or to deny immediate miraculous interpositions of divine power,—and because their history has been recorded by inspired writers, who were enabled to delineate with unerring accuracy their true character. But in all times, and in all countries, these same proposals of redeeming mercy have been treated in the same way; for how often has it

been found that poor, miserable, perishing sinners have not been contented with merely rejecting the gospel, but have manifested a malignity and hatred to it, which, if they had the power, would utterly extirpate it from the world,—would extinguish the only light that can dispel the gloom of the grave, and throw a ray of hope on the prospect of the eternity that lies beyond !

Believers cannot but feel that it is a salutary exercise for them frequently to contemplate this sad truth,—a truth which does so emphatically teach, that, in the great plan of salvation, the grace of God is every thing, and that man is nothing,—nay, that man is an enemy to that scheme, and that if he had had his will, it never would have been proposed, far less carried into execution. Nor will believers hesitate to acknowledge this truth ; for their own experience bears testimony to it. They are conscious that their heart too, like that of other men, was naturally in a state of enmity against God ; and that not only do they, in common with all other believers, owe it to the sovereign grace of God that there is a scheme for the redemption of sinners at all, but they are personally and individually indebted to a special exercise of that grace for being persuaded to embrace Christ, and for being enabled to hold fast the beginning of their confidence. Till they were effectually called by the Spirit of God, they were wandering like others,—outcasts from the divine favour, and willing exiles from his fellowship ; for they had no desire to know God, and saw not any profit in serving him. They were walking in the sight of their own eyes, and after the desires of their own heart, and would have gone still farther away from God and from righteousness. When they were awakened to a sense of their guilt and bondage, and began to look for deliverance, it was by such declarations as these before us that they first found enlargement and relief : “ Fear not : for I have redeemed thee ; I have called thee by thy name ; thou art mine.”

In like manner, when, under the chastening hand of God, overtaken by accumulated afflictions coming upon them like a flood, or visited with trials sharp and severe, even as fire, and when feeling as if their faith and patience would fail them in the conflict, it has been through such promises as are here recorded that they have derived new life, and strength, and vigour : “ When thou passest through the waters, I will be with

thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." And when, in seasons of depression and of spiritual deadness, they mourn the absence of the comfort which they once experienced, and the delight which they once felt in meditating on the love and divine excellence of the Saviour,—when they look back to the period when first they tasted of consolation and good hope, and their conscience writes bitter things against them, reminding them of the ingratitude with which they have requited the Saviour's love, the cold formality which has often characterised the homage which they offered him, their backwardness to serve him at the expense either of bodily ease or worldly comfort, the opportunities which they have lost of advancing his cause by labouring to promote the spiritual well-being of their fellow-men, and the unworthy motives which have polluted and debased even the little which they have attempted to do,—when, on reviewing their conduct as the professed followers of Jesus, they make discoveries like these, and feel as if they had forfeited and lost all right to the precious promises of the gospel, where will they find relief but in such views of the abounding grace of God as are set forth in the passage before us, and in such a declaration as God has here given concerning himself, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins?"

XVII.

THE CHURCH EXHORTED TO PRAISE GOD.

ISAIAH XLIV. 1-28.

THIS chapter, like the preceding, opens with very large and encouraging promises, following immediately upon a prediction of coming judgment. The 43d chapter closed with a very appalling statement: "Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches." This judgment, though in progress, was not fully executed in the time of the prophet, nor for a considerable time after. But so certain was it, that it was spoken of as if it had been already inflicted. The prophet's language was not a mere threatening. It was the announcement of an irreversible sentence, whereby Jacob was given to the curse, and Israel to reproaches. And the sentence was as severe as it was certain. It seemed to imply nothing short of making a full end of Israel as a nation or kingdom, not only removing the peace which God had thrown around them, and permitting their enemies, the heathen, to come in upon them like the breaking in of waters, profaning and laying desolate their sanctuary, and all that they were wont to regard as holy, but sending them into captivity, and scattering them, so as that they could never again be gathered into a separate and independent people. Not only might all this have been naturally inferred from the language of the prophet's prediction; but when that prediction was fulfilled,—when, after

a succession of invasions by the heathen nations, and the removal of many of the people to other lands, Jerusalem was at last taken by the armies of the king of Babylon, who burned the city and the temple with fire, and carried the residue of the people, already wasted both in strength and numbers, captive to Babylon;—when this last and terrible disaster overtook them, what other conclusion could human wisdom and foresight have drawn, but that God had removed Israel and Judah out of his sight for ever,—that Jacob had been permanently given to the curse, and Israel to reproaches? Nor can we doubt that they who would be most ready to surrender themselves to this desponding thought were the true people of God, the faithful remnant, who had never bowed the knee to a false God. As to the rest of the nation,—the apostate majority,—they disbelieved and despised the prophet's warning, being encouraged in their pride and presumption by their teachers, the false prophets, who deceived them to their ruin, assuring them that they would not be carried into captivity, and when they were, as confidently assuring them that it would be only for a very short season.

But it would be very different with the truly humble and devout in Judah and Jerusalem. Conscious that they were themselves chargeable with much that must have offended God, and seeing among their countrymen generally a growing hardness in sinning, even high-handed and presumptuous sinning, they would be ready to conclude that when the Lord visited them with famine, and the pestilence, and the sword, and captivity, it was for the purpose of making a full end of them. And if so, then what was to become of the promise of Messiah,—the Saviour to whose coming they had been taught to look forward, and in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed? According to the revealed purposes of God, that promise could be fulfilled only in connection with the continued existence of Israel as a people; and it was necessary, therefore, for keeping alive the faith and hope of the true Church, for preventing their sinking into utter despondency, that they should be assured, by a direct communication from God himself, that whatever might be the calamities which for a season overtook Judah and Jerusalem because of their backsliding, their national character, as a people separated from the other nations, would not be destroyed,

and that the sceptre should not finally depart from Judah until Shiloh came, to whom the gathering of the people should be. This, then, was the gracious message with which the prophet was charged for the consolation and encouragement of the true Church, not only in his own day, but during the dreary and disastrous period that followed, till the restoration of captive Judah from Babylon, and, indeed, during every season of darkness which the Jews as a nation subsequently experienced. And, accordingly, while he announced the judgments which were certainly coming on Judah, and did so in language the strongest and most appalling, that announcement was uniformly followed by a promise equally explicit, that God would remember the covenant which he swore to his servant Abraham, and would assuredly have mercy on Israel, and turn again the captivity of Jacob.

Of these promises we have a very large and comprehensive one in the preceding chapter, announcing not only the restoration of Judah from captivity, but the conversion and ingathering of other nations to the true Church: "Fear not; for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; even every one that is called by my name." In the chapter before us, we have the same promise not merely repeated, but greatly enlarged,—implying not only that outwardly Judah should be restored, and that a great accession should be made to the visible Church by the calling of the Gentiles, but that the true Church should be in a very flourishing state,—that vital godliness would very extensively prevail. "Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen." Jesurun,—signifying upright or righteous,—was a name given to Israel, not as descriptive of their real character, but as indicating what they were designed to be, and what they ought to have been, and is very appropriately applied here, where it is foretold or promised that they should one day become righteous: "Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." This promise might, perhaps, have been understood, even by

some of God's true people, as implying only outward or temporal blessings,—a season of worldly prosperity, when the earth should yield her increase, and their barns should be filled with plenty. But to prevent them from taking up with this limited view of the promise, its true import is explained in the next clause, "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." The rest of the promise is, of course, to be also understood spiritually; so that when it is said, "They shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses," it is meant that the people of God should be inwardly holy, as well as outwardly separated from the world,—that in consequence of the abundant supply of heavenly grace, the divine life in their soul should be strong and vigorous,—that they should be as trees planted by the rivers of water.

Nor was this gracious outpouring of the Spirit to be confined to Israel and Judah, properly so called,—the children of Abraham according to the flesh. * Other nations should also turn unto the Lord, and glory in being reckoned among his people: "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel;"—that is to say, that though for a season Jacob was to be given to the curse, and Israel to reproaches,—the object of contempt and derision to the nations,—yet the time would come when these nations would esteem it their honour and their privilege to be named and numbered among Israel as the servants and people of Jehovah. This was a very great and glorious promise,—so great that the people of God in Isaiah's time, as well as in subsequent times, might have staggered thereat, especially when it is remembered how much there was to try their faith and to crush their hope, both in the abounding iniquity which they saw around them, and in the judgments which they believed were coming upon them. God was graciously pleased, therefore, as on other occasions, to present to them considerations fitted to remove all doubt and misgiving as to the fulfilment of what he had promised, whatever seemingly insurmountable difficulties might stand in the way. And he appeals to what was itself sufficient to confirm their faith and reassure their heart,—even his own sovereignty, as

the only living and true God,—as alone knowing the end from the beginning,—and alone declaring what would be, because he appointed it. He appeals to their own experience as his witnesses, whether he had not given them proof the most incontestable, that he, and he only, was God.

With regard to those who made and worshipped idols, he declares that they were their own witnesses,—they could give no proof that the gods whom they worshipped had any power,—and were themselves so blind and ignorant that they had not sense enough to be ashamed of their own folly, which they would have been if they had only reflected how and of what their idols were made: “They are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.” There is then given, in the 10th and following verses, an exposure of the amazing folly and infatuation of idolaters. They are represented as toiling and expending their strength, even to exhaustion, in making a god that cannot help or strengthen them for the work. They are, in fact, the maker, or, as it were, the creator of their own god. They choose a tree which their own hands, it may be, but at all events human hands, may have planted, and which the rain of heaven nourished. Of this tree they employ a part for the most ordinary purposes, and of the rest they make a god: “He burneth part thereof in the fire,”—that is, maketh fuel thereof,—“with part thereof he eateth flesh,”—that is, prepares food with the fire which he had made,—“he roasteth roast, and is satisfied; yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: and the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, . . . and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.” It is impossible to conceive a more melancholy representation than this of the blindness, degradation, and debasement of man’s fallen nature. But so absurd, also, does idolatry appear when thus set forth, that we may be disposed, perhaps, to wonder that believers in the prophet’s day should have required such an exposure as is here given of the vanity of idols, and the folly of the idolater, to assure them that the false gods of the nations could do nothing to prevent or retard the fulfilment of the divine promises. But we must remember that the people of God in that time had witnessed many a defeat and disaster which Israel and Judah sustained at the hand of the heathen,—

that these heathen ascribed the victories which they won to the interposition and assistance of their gods,—and that the leading men in Judah and Jerusalem did also believe that monstrous lie; for we find one of their kings saying, “Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me.”

It is impossible, indeed, for us to conceive what insidious forms idolatry might assume in those times of prevailing ungodliness, when the great question with the majority of Judah and Jerusalem seemed to be, how they might shake off all fear of the true God, and how they might make their escape from the restraints which a sense of his sovereignty would have imposed upon them. There would not be wanting manifold fabulous, but apparently well-authenticated accounts of the wonderful things which these false gods had done on behalf of their votaries; and none would be more zealous and active in propagating these than the apostate men of Judah and Jerusalem,—that is to say, the great body of God’s professing people. In such circumstances, it were difficult, perhaps impossible, to estimate the strength of faith and the amount of moral courage that was necessary, on the part of God’s true people, to resist the tide which had set in in favour of idolatry; at all events, to be able to shake themselves free of the superstitious awe with which idols were almost universally regarded, and of the dread of the mysterious power which was ascribed to them. It was in great kindness, then, and in marvellous condescension to the weakness of his people, that God was pleased to set before them, as is here done, the vanity and utter impotence of idols, and the monstrous folly and infatuation of those who trusted in them,—and thereby to show them that these idols could do nothing to defeat the counsel or make void the promise of Him who is the first and the last, and beside whom there is no god. And having so exposed the nothingness of idols, and the matchless folly of idol-worship, he again graciously addresses his people in the language of encouragement, assuring them that his sovereignty was engaged on behalf of Israel, and that until the purpose for which he had chosen them was accomplished, he would protect and deliver them in spite of all opposition: “Remember these,”—these truths which have now been stated,—“O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have

formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me."

But though enough was thus said to remove any fear or mis-giving which the people of God might entertain, lest the false gods of the nations and their deluded votaries should interfere with the fulfilment of the divine promises concerning Israel, there was another ground of distrust which might occasion them perplexity and trouble,—and that was a sense of their guilt and unworthiness. Not only did they see, in the almost universal apostasy of their countrymen, enough to justify God's procedure, if he should have for ever cast them off as a nation; but they would feel that they also had sinned, and had by their sins added to the amount of national guilt; and they might be ready, therefore, to ask whether such an accumulation of sin, independently of all outward opposition and hindrances, would not be enough to prevent a divine interposition on their behalf. But this ground of fear and distrust was also graciously removed by the assurance of a free and a full forgiveness, and an invitation to them, on the ground of that very forgiveness, to return to God, to dismiss the suspicion and distrust which kept them at a distance from him, and to draw near with filial confidence, in the full expectation of his promises being fulfilled: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins,"—that is, I have removed, or put away, the sins and transgressions which, as a cloud, intercepted and prevented the light of the divine countenance from reaching thee,—"return," therefore, "unto me; for I have redeemed thee."

To the downcast and afflicted Church of Isaiah's time, this gracious assurance and paternal invitation must have been full of comfort and consolation. But it was obviously designed also for those who, under the pressure of affliction, brought upon them by their folly and disobedience, were to be awakened to a sense of their guiltiness, and to the conviction that there could be no peace or happiness for them unless they were restored again to the divine favour; but who were, at the same time, to be so overwhelmed with the consciousness of having utterly forfeited all interest in the good things which God had spoken concerning Israel, as almost to despair of any gracious interposition on their behalf. This was to be, in regard to many, the effect

of the divine judgments foretold by the prophet, especially in the case of those who were carried into captivity; and when they were brought to this state of mind, what but such a declaration as that before us could dispel their guilty fears, and bring them back in penitence and faith to God? "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." But what more was needed to banish their suspicion and distrust, and to reassure their hearts before God, believing that he was pacified towards them for all that they had done? Their forgiveness depended not on any thing in them. It was altogether of sovereign grace. It was of grace that they were to be brought into an humble and penitent frame of spirit under their affliction; for if left to themselves, that affliction would only have called forth, with greater energy and bitterness, a spirit of rebellion against God, and dissatisfaction with his appointments. It was of his mere good pleasure that he was to pour out upon them the spirit of grace and supplication, whereby they should be moved to pray for and expect forgiveness. And it was in fulfilment of a promise which was itself altogether of free grace, that he was to hear and answer their supplication. His own glory, moreover, was concerned in doing all this for them, or rather was the great end for which he wrought. It was in vindication of his truth and rectitude that he was to visit Judah and Jerusalem with righteous judgment,—thereby demonstrating, in their bitter experience, the vanity of the idols to which they had turned, and proving that He whom they had forsaken was the only living and true God. But still more gloriously was his sovereignty to be displayed, and his great name glorified, not only in their eyes, but in the sight of the heathen, when he should make bare his holy arm for the deliverance of his people. And, accordingly, all nature is called upon to rejoice in that deliverance, as the brightest manifestation of the character and perfections of Jehovah: "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel."

Such was the cheering prospect held out to the Church in Isaiah's time, for the purpose of keeping alive their faith and

hope in a season of great and still growing degeneracy and darkness. But as if there might still be some lingering doubt, some lurking fear in their minds, whether such a glorious state of things would or could be brought about, the prophet reverts again to the consideration of Jehovah's supremacy, his omniscience, and omnipotence, as pledged for the accomplishment of all that had just been foretold, however wonderful and unlikely it might be. To human wisdom and foresight, it might indeed seem the most improbable of all things,—nay, absolutely impossible. But the Church were reminded that He who undertook to bring about the predicted change was the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth,—he who frustrated the tokens, and falsified the predictions of lying prophets,—who turned wise men backward, and made their knowledge foolish, or, as the apostle expresses it, confounded the wisdom of the wise, and brought to nothing the understanding of the prudent; and, at the same time, confirmed the word of his servants,—that is, every one of his servants the prophets,—and performed the counsel of his messengers, however strange and apparently improbable might be the events which they announced, even when they said to Jerusalem, which was assuredly to be laid in ashes, "Thou shalt be inhabited, and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built." When that disaster did befall Jerusalem, when the city and temple were laid in ruins, and the people were carried captive to Babylon, it was a very improbable thing that the city should again be built, and its captive inhabitants restored. It was this very consideration, however, that was to bring out more clearly the omniscience and omnipotence of Jehovah in accomplishing that restoration. And not only, therefore, was this unlikely thing foretold; but as if to show that the more unlikely that it was, the more would the accomplishment of it redound to God's glory, it was declared that the very sovereign by whom Judah was held in bondage, and who is expressly mentioned by name, should be the person who gave forth the command for executing the divine purpose. The Lord "saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid."

The main subject of this chapter is the promise of an abundant

outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and, consequently, of great enlargement and prosperity to the Church,—enlargement, by the increase in number of true believers,—and prosperity, by the increase of holiness in those who believe. This promise is contained in the first five verses of the chapter. All that follows, as we have seen, was designed to give to the Church of the prophet's time, and of all subsequent times, till the fulfilment of the promise, the assurance that it would be fulfilled in spite of all opposition. This was obviously the purpose for which a lengthened contrast is here stated between the sovereignty of Jehovah and the impotence of idols,—showing that the people of God had nothing to fear from false gods and their votaries who trusted in them. In like manner, it was for the purpose of removing from the minds of God's people the fear that sin might prevent the fulfilment of the promise, that God declared himself gracious and merciful,—thereby intimating that the proclamation of a free and full forgiveness was the very means by which sinners were to be melted into godly sorrow, and won over from their rebellion; or, in other words, the very means of bringing about the blessed state of things here foretold. And, finally, the restoration of captive Judah from Babylon was foretold, as a pledge that the great promise would be fulfilled. In one sense, indeed, and to a certain extent, that restoration was itself the fulfilment of the promise, inasmuch as it was included in it, and formed an essential link in that chain of events which were preparatory to Christ's coming, and to all the glorious consequences of his appearing. Still, it was rather a renewal and confirmation of the promise than the fulfilment of it; for now that we know all that took place, when Cyrus issued his decree to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, we can have no difficulty in perceiving that, great as was the change which then took place in the character as well as the condition of the Jews, it fell far, very far short of what is predicted in the first five verses of this chapter. That prediction, undoubtedly, refers to Gospel times,—the new dispensation,—which is emphatically the ministration of the Spirit. It is to Gospel times, therefore, that we must look for its full accomplishment. And already we have seen it fulfilled to no small extent; for when we contemplate the labours of the apostles, and the consequences of these labours,—when we think of the vast multitudes of both Jews and Gentiles,

who, in the short space of a few years, were brought to the knowledge of the truth, and exhibited a holiness and spirituality of character which astonished as well as offended an ungodly world,—and when we think of the extent to which Christianity has since spread throughout the world, and the blessed fruit which, notwithstanding much perversion, it has produced, and is still producing, we must be convinced that the language of the prophet applies to Gospel times, as it never did to any period of the Old Testament Church subsequent to his own day.

But viewing the prediction before us in connection with many others of a similar import, we cannot doubt that it still remains to be fulfilled to an extent that it has never yet been. And this, I believe, will be admitted, in words at least, by professing Christians generally. But there is reason to fear that with many there is a lurking suspicion, or rather disbelief of this truth. When we look, indeed, at the number, the variety, and the strength of the hostile forces which oppose the progress of the pure and simple Gospel of Jesus Christ,—the vast extent to which infidelity prevails among the wise and the learned, in one or other of its varied forms, from open, avowed, blaspheming atheism, down to the liberality which acknowledges God, but holds all religions to be equally acceptable to him,—the devotedness to worldly gain and worldly gratification which characterises no small portion of mankind, and which renders them utterly averse to the subject of divine truth,—the grievous perversion of Christianity itself, whereby its holy truths are rendered palatable to the corrupt hearts of men, deceiving them to their ruin,—and the countless thousands who are still idolaters, and so mad upon their idols that many deem their conversion a hopeless, at least, if not an impossible thing;—when we seriously contemplate all this, we may be in danger of giving way to the feeling, that the universal spread of the Gospel, as a quickening and life-giving principle in the hearts and consciences of men, assimilating them in mind and character to Jesus Christ, is indeed a hopeless thing. But is not this feeling just as derogatory to God, and as much a distrust of his sovereignty and faithfulness, as it would have been on the part of his people in the prophet's time to suppose that the false gods of the nations and their blind worshippers could prevent the execution of his decrees, and the fulfilment of his

promises? What are idols now, that God should not break them in pieces, and set free their enslaved votaries, as he has often done before, and has promised to do again? And what are infidels, even nations of atheists, in God's hand, more than the warlike nations of old, the worshippers of false gods, whom he dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel? And what are the wise men of the present day, with their philosophy of what they call the nineteenth century, whether in deference to or in contempt of Christianity, I know not; but what are they, that God should not be able still to destroy the wisdom of the wise, and to bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent? And yet, are we not prone to look upon these enemies of the Gospel as if they were unconquerable, and upon these obstacles to the spread of the Gospel as if they were insurmountable?

Alas! instead of wondering how the Church in Isaiah's day should have needed such an elaborate exposure as this chapter contains of the vanity and impotency of idols, to satisfy them that these idols and all who trusted in them had no power to arrest, or even retard, Jehovah's great work, I fear that we need as much as they did to study this chapter, as written even for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. I fear that we are in danger of paying the same superstitious reverence to the infidel philosophy and the liberal scepticism of our own day, that the Church of old did to the idolatry of theirs,—with this difference, that they could plead more plausibly for their distrust and unbelief than we can do for ours. O let us beware of thus tempting God, and limiting the Holy One of Israel! Let us beware of doubting the power and competency of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the part which he has undertaken in the great plan of redemption. He was promised, and he has come to convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. He began that work, in a special and very palpable manner, on the day of Pentecost, when he descended upon the apostles, filling them with all knowledge, and wisdom, and spiritual understanding; and through their instrumentality pierced the hearts and consciences of thousands,—awakening them to a sense of their guilt and misery,—leading them for refuge to the very Saviour whom, a short time before, they had crucified and slain,—and thus turning them from darkness to

light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive the forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified, by faith that is in Christ Jesus. And this was but the earnest of what he was subsequently to do in applying to God's elect the redemption purchased by Christ. From that day to this, the great work of redemption has been going on; and a multitude, whom no man can number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation, and people, have been effectually called,—the Gospel, even the glad tidings of a full and free remission of sins, having come to them, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.

It is true that this work of the Spirit has hitherto been very partial and limited, when we look to the vast regions that yet lie in darkness, having never seen the light of the Gospel at all, and when we take into account the multitudes also who, even in lands where the Gospel shines, are still sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. But while we profess to be deeply concerned for the condition of these our unhappy fellow-men, let us beware of doubting that, by the simple preaching of the Gospel, the Spirit is able to accomplish the work which he has undertaken. Let us not, in our impatient zeal, seek for some other and more expeditious way of bringing the world under the dominion of Christ, than that which he himself, in accordance with the Father's will, and with the gracious acquiescence of the Spirit, appointed, when he promised the disciples that the Comforter should come to them, and should abide with them for ever, testifying of Christ, leading them into all truth, and accompanying their preaching of the Gospel, so that it might prove to men the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation. Let us beware of adopting the idea that there must be another dispensation than that which the apostle denominates the ministration of the Spirit,—some new and peculiar manifestation of Christ himself personally before the world can be subdued to him,—lest it be found that by adopting such an opinion, we are undervaluing and distrusting the power and competency of the Spirit to accomplish the work which he has undertaken,—lest we should be virtually saying that, after an experiment of eighteen hundred years, the dispensation of the Spirit must give place to another, before the promise to Abra-

ham can be fulfilled, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." If we really are anxious and in earnest for the extension and establishment of Christ's kingdom, let us be anxious and in earnest in pleading the fulfilment of the prediction before us,—even the promise of an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That may come any day or any hour; and we should never cease, therefore, to pray for and expect it. And come when it may, it will begin with the Spirit of grace and supplication being poured upon individuals. In proportion, then, as we are quickened to prayer, and strengthened to labour for the extension of Christ's kingdom, our hope of its speedy establishment will revive; and while we patiently leave the times and seasons in the Father's hand, we shall feel a growing confidence in the promise, that though "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed," yet Christ shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

XVIII.

JEHOVAH DECLARES THE IMPOTENCY OF FALSE GODS.

ISAIAH XLVI. 1-13.

THE preceding chapter contains a promise of the great deliverances which God purposed to work out on behalf of his people, and of the spiritually prosperous state to which the Church was to be exalted. Of these deliverances, one is specially mentioned,—namely, the restoration of Judah from the captivity of Babylon. That was the deliverance which was peculiarly and more immediately interesting to the Church of the prophet's time,—a deliverance, moreover, which was to furnish a very striking manifestation of the supremacy of Jehovah, and which was necessary for the fulfilment of all the promises concerning Messiah which had been given to the Church from the beginning. But though the restoration of the Babylonish captivity, as well as the marvellous manner in which it was to be brought about, is specially mentioned, it does not form the only subject of the prediction contained in the preceding chapter. That prediction extended to Gospel times,—the time of Messiah himself,—the full revelation of the great plan of redemption,—the revelation of the great mystery of God as the just God and the Saviour,—and the proclamation of a free salvation to all the ends of the earth,—to Gentiles as well as Jews. This was the great promise to the fulfilment of which the Church, during the whole period of the Old Testament dispensation, had been taught to look forward; and the special prediction of the deli-

verance of Judah by Cyrus was given as a pledge that the great promise would assuredly be fulfilled, and as one in the series of events which were to lead to that fulfilment. These remarks are applicable, also, to the chapter before us. Here the prophet proceeds to foretell the downfall of the enemies of the Church, and to expose their utter impotency for defeating God's gracious purposes towards his people; and as the deliverance of Judah from Babylon was specially mentioned as an example of the great things that were in reserve for the Church, so the overthrow of the idols of Babylon is here announced as an example of the destruction which would assuredly overtake the Church's enemies: "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth."

Bel and Nebo were the names of the two chief deities or gods of the Babylonians; and it has been remarked, that the high estimation in which these deities were held by their blinded worshippers appears from the frequency with which we find their names forming part of the names of the Babylonian kings and great men. Thus, besides other examples to be found in profane history, we find in Scripture such names as Belshazzar, and Belteshazzar, evidently taken from the name Bel; and, in like manner, Nebuchadnezzar, and Nebuzar-adan, derived from Nebo. The prophet, then, expressly mentions these as the leading deities or gods of Babylon, including, of course, under these two, all the other false gods to which the Babylonians did homage; and he proceeds to foretell, in a very striking manner, their complete and final overthrow. He represents the idols, or images of these gods, as carried away, like spoil from a vanquished country, on beasts of burden and on carriages: "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth; their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy loaden; they are a burden to the weary beast."

But while the idols or images were thus treated as common things, and carried away like any other article of plunder, the gods themselves, supposing they had any separate existence, were not able to rescue them. "They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves,"—literally their souls,—“are gone into captivity,” or, as it has been paraphrased by a learned commentator, “Bel and Nebo are unable to rescue their own images, for they are themselves gone into captivity,”—

the whole god, soul and body, all that there was of him, is gone into captivity. And this, it is obvious, is just a very emphatic way of declaring that the idol, or image, was the whole god,—that the imaginary deity had no separate existence,—and that when the idols of Babylon were carried away as spoil or plunder, the gods of Babylon were taken captive. And what was the inference which Judah might have drawn from this representation of the gods of Babylon? Plainly this, that so far from being able to hold the people of God in captivity, they had no power nor might to prevent themselves being carried away captive. And to impress them still more deeply with this consoling truth, the people of God are reminded of what he had already done for them, and of what he had promised still to do, at the same time that a striking contrast is drawn between his almighty power and the utter impotency of false gods: “Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: and even to your old age I am he: and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.”

Here the Church, or people of God, are spoken of as one individual, and the different periods of their history are represented by the different stages of an individual's life; and an appeal is made to their own experience whether God had not been to them all that he here says, accompanied with an assurance that he would still continue to be so. We need not inquire at what particular stage or period of life the Church might be said to have arrived, at the time that these words were addressed to her. The purpose for which she was so addressed was to assure her, that her relation to God, as his covenant people, should never be dissolved,—that though she might experience vicissitudes which might be aptly compared to those which occur to an individual in the course of life between infancy and old age, yet his gracious purpose could never change, nor his faithfulness fail,—and that her time of feebleness and greatest need would be the time of his most gracious interpositions on her behalf. We can easily conceive that true believers, the humble and devout of Isaiah's time, might feel as if the Church had already arrived at old age, and might be ready to conclude that she was hastening to decay,—

especially when they looked forward to the calamities which the prophet had foretold. But their unbelieving fears were rebuked, and we cannot doubt that their hopes were revived, when Jehovah himself condescended to ask them who it was of whom they needed to be afraid in opposition to him: "To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?" Is it an idol,—a god of man's making, that needs to be carried and set in his place, where he standeth, and cannot remove, and where they cry unto him, but he cannot hear or help them?

This representation of an idol is rendered peculiarly striking, as contrasted with what God had previously said of himself. He had reminded his people that He, their God, was their Maker; but idolaters were the makers of their gods;—that Jehovah had borne and carried his people; but the idol needed to be borne by those who worshipped him. From this contrast between the omnipotence of God and the helplessness of idols,—a contrast fitted to strengthen the faith and revive the hope of God's people,—occasion is taken to address a solemn remonstrance to those, whether of Israel and Judah, or of the heathen, who did still cleave to idolatry, urging them to acknowledge and turn to the true God: "Remember this, and show yourselves men;" that is, to act rationally, and not as fools; "bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors." To enforce this admonition, they are called to contemplate the proofs which had been given from ancient times, even from the beginning, of God's being, perfections, and sovereignty, and they are assured that this sovereignty will be still farther demonstrated in the future, when it will be made to appear that his counsel shall stand, and that he will do all his pleasure. Reference is again made to Cyrus, here called "a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth God's counsel from a far country," as about to furnish a new and incontrovertible proof of the omnipotence and omniscience of Jehovah; and the chapter closes with a solemn warning to the ungodly of all classes and degrees, that the righteousness of God would be revealed in the salvation of his people, and the destruction of his enemies: "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory."

The main subject of this chapter is God's faithfulness to his Church, and, as the consequence of this, her preservation amidst all dangers, and her continued extension in spite of all opposition. This general truth is announced in the 3d and 4th verses: "Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb; and even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." And the same truth is again stated in the last verse of the chapter, "I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory." This truth, as here recorded, was, no doubt, addressed to Judah and Jerusalem, or rather to the true Church there, in Isaiah's day, and with a special reference to the restoration of the captivity from Babylon. But though peculiarly fitted to comfort and encourage them in their season of sore trial and of dark prospects, it was not exclusively designed for them. The deliverance in which they were more immediately concerned, and which was here foretold, was only an example, one among many of the great deliverances which God had wrought, and has since wrought, and will continue to work out on behalf of his redeemed people, the Church, which he has here declared is his glory. And as an example or illustration of God's gracious interposition on behalf of the Church, the deliverance which is here more immediately foretold is a very encouraging one to his people of all subsequent times, in seasons of darkness and declension, when iniquity abounds, and when the state of religion is low.

Such was the character of the period at which the prophet was charged with the gracious message recorded in this chapter. There was at that moment a very general, an almost universal defection on the part of Judah, and with one, or, at the most, two short seasons of revival, that defection was to grow, till it terminated in their being carried captive to Babylon. But it was at this very period, when the true Church was, to all appearance, well-nigh overwhelmed, that God was to glorify his great name in the sight of the heathen, by turning again the captivity of Judah, and, by the instrumentality of the very king whose captives they were, "saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." And so it was

in regard to the greatest and most glorious of all the divine interpositions on behalf of the Church, that of which every other was but a shadow or type,—namely, the appearing of the promised Messiah. At that period the state of religion was as low, and the prospects of the true Church were as dark, as they could be at any former period. There was not, indeed, the same open apostasy from the worship of the true God to idolatry; and to outward appearance, therefore, the Church might be far more prosperous than in the time of Isaiah, and for an hundred years after. But though the declension of the visible Church assumed a different form, it was not a less real or a less wide departure from God. There was the show and the form; but, with the great mass of the people, there was nothing of the power or practice of vital godliness. A cold and heartless formality had taken the place of spiritual worship, and in the carnal and worldly expectations which they cherished, even regarding Messiah's kingdom, there was as real idolatry as in the case of their fathers who bowed the knee to false gods.

With regard to those who were believers, and who constituted the true Church,—those who felt their spiritual necessities, and were really “waiting for the consolation of Israel,”—it is evident from the Gospel history that they were few in number, and that their faith, moreover, was weak, and their understanding of spiritual things darkened, in consequence of the prevailing opinions concerning the nature of Messiah's kingdom; for how long and how fondly did the disciples themselves cling to the hope of seeing their divine Master establishing a temporal kingdom, literally sitting on the throne of David his father, and reigning as David did over the house of Israel and Judah! It was in this low state, then, of the Church, when the true faith was, to all appearance, ready to expire, that God was pleased, in accordance with the promise recorded in this chapter, to visit and redeem his people, and to raise up an horn of salvation for them in the house of his servant David. This, in fact, was the great deliverance promised in the passage under consideration, and prefigured by all former deliverances which were wrought for Israel; and the state of the Church, at the time it took place, does most strikingly demonstrate the faithfulness of the promise here recorded. The spiritual life of the Jewish

Church had almost expired,—the true religion was well-nigh extinguished. But the covenant promise stood unretracted and unchanged, “Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” And the promise was accordingly fulfilled. When the light of the old dispensation had faded, and was ready to vanish away, the Sun of Righteousness arose, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of his people Israel. And this light will continue to spread. It may be brighter, generally, at one time than at another, and it may be more or less clear at the same place at different times. The Church, as formerly, is still liable to vicissitudes; for the Church is still composed of sinful men who are ever in danger of backsliding, or declining from the right path; and the enemies of the Church are still ready to take advantage of every thing that may be converted into an obstacle to the progress of the Gospel. To all appearance, therefore, that progress may at times be arrested or greatly retarded; and its final triumph may seem to be all but hopeless. And the enemy will have gained a great advantage, if he can persuade God’s people that it is so, and that any efforts of theirs to revive or to extend the true religion will be altogether unavailing. It is especially at such seasons, then, that believers are required to remember, and to plead, and to rely on the promise in the passage before us, believing that the enemies of the Church, however numerous and powerful they may appear, are as impotent as the idols of old were, when opposed to the execution of the divine purposes, and that even at the darkest period the command may go forth, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.”

But while there is thus, in the view here given of the divine faithfulness to the Church, a great deal to keep alive the faith and hope of the believer regarding the progress and final triumph of the Gospel, there is much also to comfort and encourage him respecting his own spiritual interest. The assurance given to the Church collectively is given also to every individual believer; so that God’s gracious declaration to every one of his people is, “Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” It is as true of believers indi-

vidually, as it was of Israel collectively, that God is their Maker, not only in the sense of being their Creator, but as having selected and called them out of a sinful world, and separated them to be a peculiar people to himself. Till he thus visited them, they were in a state of bondage, and were contented to be so. They were not his people; they were the willing servants of sin. When, therefore, by his Spirit, he awakened them to a sense of their misery and degradation, persuaded them to accept of his gracious offer of interposing for their deliverance, enabled them, to embrace Jesus Christ, and thus brought them from darkness and bondage into the light and liberty of the sons of God, might he not address them as he did Israel of old, "Ye have seen . . . how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself?" And having thus brought them out of the house of bondage, he has promised that he will continue to bear and to carry them. The very language in which the promise is expressed intimates that he knows all the infirmities with which they are encompassed, and all the dangers to which they are exposed; and that he is able, therefore, as he is willing, to help them in every time of need.

He does not, however, promise them that they shall never experience a painful sense of their infirmities, or that they shall be raised above all apprehension of danger. On the contrary, it is by being made to feel their own helplessness that they are taught the extent of their obligations to the grace which sustains them; and it is by being called to conflict with their spiritual enemies, and so kept alive to a sense of their danger, that they are shut up to a constant and exclusive reliance on Him who can alone help and deliver. The very promise of deliverance implies that they will at times not only be in danger, but feel that they are so, and that if not strengthened and upheld, they would assuredly make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. They may be subjected to worldly trials and afflictions, under which they are in danger of becoming impatient and fretful, offending God, and injuring their own spiritual health. They may be exposed to temptation from without, to the danger of being drawn into inconsistencies, whereby they would bring discredit on their Christian profession, and wound their own conscience. And their great spiritual adversary may

be permitted at times to disturb and harass them by suggestions which they find it difficult to repel, and by doubts regarding their state which do greatly discourage and depress them. Such trials may overtake them for the exercise of their faith and patience, and as the gracious discipline whereby all the graces of the Christian character are strengthened and matured. But there is reason to fear that frequently, very frequently, trials are required in the way of chastisement. Believers are too much in danger of forgetting, like Israel of old, what great things God has done for them ; and if permitted long to enjoy undisturbed worldly comfort, they would become still more insensible to their obligations, and still less disposed to inquire what the Lord would have them to do.

It is in perfect accordance, then, with the promise in the passage under consideration, when in such cases God visits them with affliction, or permits them for a season to reap the bitter fruits of their declension. It is not because he is weary of bearing them, but because they have become weary of waiting upon him. It is not because he has ceased to carry them, but because they have ceased for a season to feel their dependence on him, and must be reminded of it. It is not because he is unwilling to deliver them, but because they must be made sensible of their danger before they are willing to be delivered. He does, therefore, in reality, fulfil his promise when he thus leaves them to experience the consequences of their lukewarmness, backsliding, and sin, because they are thereby brought into that state in which alone they can enjoy its fulfilment. And when they are thus again quickened to a sense of their dependence and their helplessness, and have been taught, in their bitter experience, their need of constant communications of divine grace to sustain and strengthen them, they will find that God is the faithful and covenant-keeping God, and they will be convinced that it was in faithfulness that he afflicted them. And are there not many who can bear testimony to the truth of all this in their actual experience? Nay, have not all true believers experienced, in a greater or less degree, the truth of these remarks? Even they who may have but lately entered on the Christian life, and have known but little, comparatively, of the severity of the conflict to which they are called, must neverthe-

less have had some practical proofs of the faithfulness of the promise in the passage before us. Though their worldly vicissitudes have been few, and their worldly trials light, they will recollect occasions on which disappointments or trials of some kind proved not only very great, but very seasonable blessings, being the means of awakening them again to serious reflection when they were becoming cold and indifferent to divine things, —checking and restraining them when they were in danger of falling into sin,—and bringing them into that subdued and softened state of mind in which the Word found readier access to them, whether for reproof or for encouragement. And in looking back on such seasons, they will acknowledge that God was then graciously fulfilling his promise to them,—bearing them when they were ready to fall, and delivering them when their spiritual interests were in danger.

And are there not many, also, in whose experience the promise in the passage before us has been fulfilled in its full extent, —many who can say, that even to old age and hoar hairs, the Lord has not failed to bear, and to carry, and to deliver them? In looking back on the way by which he has led them these many years in the wilderness, I doubt not they will remember, and dwell with admiration and gratitude on many instances of gracious interpositions on their behalf,—when they were comforted in affliction,—strengthened for the discharge of painful duties,—seasonably aided by outward providences, as well as by inward grace, in times of temptation,—delivered out of difficulties that greatly perplexed them,—and visited with communications of heavenly light and consolation in seasons of spiritual darkness and depression. In regard to God's providential dealings with them, they can, perhaps, remember that some of these were very painful to flesh and blood, and that they had sometimes a sore struggle to keep down the rebellious thought that they were more painful and more severe than was necessary. Though, from the first moment that they really came to Christ, and began to take up their cross and follow him, they had been taught to expect that they would find this world to be at the best a wilderness,—and though they professed to believe this, and thought that they were reconciled to it, as a wise and gracious ordination,—yet they can recollect times, perhaps, when

they felt as if they had been too closely taken at their word, and as if this world had been made more desolate and more of a wilderness to them than they had reason to expect or reckon on. They will remember, perhaps, that these were not only some of the bitterest, but also the most dangerous periods of their spiritual history,—the periods at which unbelief made the largest inroad on their peace and comfort, and was like to have dried up altogether the source of their consolation. At the time, they did in reality think, though they might not dare to avow it, even to themselves, that they were hardly dealt with. But when they now call to remembrance how at these seasons God dealt with them,—how he gave power to his Word, when they read or heard it, so to rebuke them for their fretfulness and impatience as to make them feel that it was written expressly for them,—and how, after humbling them by the rebuke of his Word, he sent to them, from the same Word, such abundant consolation as they had never before experienced, and such views of the riches of his grace as they had never before entertained,—they will acknowledge that, in regard to all these trials, it was in divine love and faithfulness that not their will but His was done. They will confess, with humility and gratitude, that but for such trials, their attachment to the world would have gathered strength,—to the great jeopardy of their best, their eternal interests; and that their disappointment, in finding that the world was more of a wilderness than they had seriously believed or reckoned on, was the manifestation of a spirit which, if not checked, would have led them to wish and to labour that the world might not be to them a wilderness at all, but a permanent place of abode. They will give thanks that this miserable delusion was dissipated; and instead of complaining that the discipline employed to dissipate it was so severe, it will be the subject of their grateful acknowledgment that it was so light; and that now, when they have approached very near to the termination of their journey, they have found life to be so much less of a desolate and waste howling wilderness than, from their waywardness, and folly, and proneness to settle down in it, they might have had reason to expect. And when they look back on the many years that are past, and forward to the few,—the very few, if any,—that are before them, with what confidence,

and peace, and good hope, may they not repose on the gracious assurance, "Even to old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you!"

But while the passage before us is full of encouragement and comfort to God's people, at all ages, and in all circumstances, it addresses to others a very compassionate, but a very solemn remonstrance: "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry." The righteousness of God will be revealed alike clearly, and at the same time, in the salvation of his people, and in the destruction of his enemies; for at the last day, God "will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained," even Jesus Christ, who "shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day." The full and final salvation of God's people is thus inseparably connected with the final and irretrievable destruction of his enemies. The two form parts of the same great and glorious manifestation. This truth was intimated in the divine dealings from the beginning, inasmuch as the deliverances wrought for the Church involved the discomfiture and overthrow of his enemies; and the same solemn truth is here plainly taught, and made the ground of a very solemn warning or remonstrance, addressed to those who are stout-hearted, and far from righteousness. It may, perhaps, be supposed that the expression "stout-hearted" must mean those who openly and daringly set themselves against God and his cause, avowedly manifesting their hatred to the Gospel, and labouring to arrest its progress, and to counteract its influence. And, no doubt, the expression is peculiarly applicable to such, and designed to include them. But it were a very grievous mistake, and a very dangerous delusion to many, I fear, to suppose that it comprehends none but such open, presumptuous, and daring despisers of God. It undoubtedly comprehends all, whatever may be

their profession and outward bearing towards God and divine things, who have not returned to him in penitence and faith, by the way which he has himself appointed,—the way which, in these last days, Jesus has consecrated through the veil,—that is to say, his flesh.

All such are still far from righteousness,—the only righteousness in which they can stand accepted before God. They may have a profession of faith, a form of godliness, a name to live. But they have not closed with Christ as those who have really felt that they were lost, and are willing unconditionally to commit themselves to him, to be saved in his own way and upon his own terms. They have not felt sin to be the degradation of their nature and the source of all their misery, nor have they any anxious or sincere desire to be holy, to be transformed into the image of Christ, and to have the same mind in them that was also in him. They are still spiritually dead,—dead in trespasses and sins. They are, therefore, far from righteousness in every sense of the word, far from the righteousness of Christ, by which alone they can be justified, and far from the personal righteousness wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost in the work of sanctification. And being far from righteousness, they are stout-hearted, as the passage before us teaches. And who can be called stout-hearted, if it be not those who have never been so impressed with God's righteous denunciation of wrath against sin, as to be brought seriously and anxiously to inquire what they shall do to be saved? Who are stout-hearted, if it be not those who have never been melted into godly sorrow for sin, while contemplating what was necessary to make an atonement for it in the sufferings and death of the Son of God? Who can be called stout-hearted, if it be not those who have all their life long given to the veriest vanity, the most transitory enjoyment of this present life, a larger place in their thoughts, and a larger portion of their strength and their time, than they ever bestowed on the consideration of that glorious and unfading inheritance which God has revealed to them in the Gospel?

XIX.

THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON.

ISAIAH XLVII. 1-15.

IN the preceding chapter, the prophet had set forth the supremacy of God in striking contrast with the impotency, the nothingness of false gods, especially, or as an example, the idols of Babylon,—representing these idols as not only unable to retain God's people in bondage, when his set time of deliverance came, but as destitute of the power of preventing themselves from being carried into captivity: "They stoop; they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity."

The prophet, having thus foretold the downfall of the idols of Babylon, proceeds in the chapter under consideration to predict the overthrow of Babylon itself,—that is, of the city and state so called. He represents it under the figure of a royal virgin, and foretells of her that she should be reduced to the lowest state of destitution and debasement, even to the condition of a female slave, to whom was assigned, especially in eastern countries, the meanest and most degrading services: "Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones and grind meal." And not only was she to be thus reduced to shame and disgrace, but there would be none that could deliver; nay, not one that would even endeavour to help her: "I will take

vengeance, and I will not meet thee as a man,"—literally, I will not meet or encounter a man,—that is, none will venture to resist or contend with me. This is the language of God himself, asserting his own supremacy, and declaring his unchangeable faithfulness towards his covenant people, on whose behalf vengeance was to be taken on their heathen oppressors. And the prophet adds, in the name of the Church, "As for our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel." Babylon is then again directly addressed,—her sins are reckoned up,—and the judgments which these sins were to bring upon her are more fully and minutely detailed.

And the first of the sins enumerated is her treatment of captive Judah, which is represented as being harsh and cruel. This, of course, was a prediction of what the Babylonians would be guilty of; for the captivity itself did not take place for at least an hundred years after the prophecy in this chapter was delivered. But, as is common in the writings of Isaiah, it is spoken of as if it had already taken place, and as if Judah had actually experienced at the hand of Babylon the cruelty here foretold: "I was wroth with my people; I have polluted mine inheritance,"—that is, I have permitted it to be dealt with by the heathen as a common or unclean thing,— "I have given them into thine hand: thou didst show them no mercy; upon the ancient,"—that is, upon the aged, upon those who were least able to resist thee,— "hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke." With this cruelty to God's people, Babylon was chargeable also with unrestrained indulgence in all those vices which worldly prosperity, and power, and wealth serve to generate, and which her abominable idolatry sanctioned and encouraged; while, in her pride and self-confidence, she thought herself beyond the reach of any reverse or change of condition. And the nature of the judgments which were to overtake her is described as corresponding with the character of her sins: "Thou art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly; that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children." The judgment that was to come on Babylon is accordingly expressed in language corresponding to this proud and stout-hearted self-confidence: "But these two things,"—the things that she thought farthest from her,— "shall come to

thee in a moment,"—that is, unexpectedly,—“in one day,”—that is, together, or at the same time,—namely, “the loss of children, and widowhood : they shall come upon thee in their perfection.”

Every one can understand what a terrible desolation it would be for a haughty and imperious woman, whose pride and glory consisted in her husband and children, to be deprived of them all by a sudden stroke, and at once. And such was the desolation that was to overtake Babylon, in the very midst of her pride and self-glorying. It was her self-confidence, indeed, her reliance on the wisdom of her own counsel, and on the strength of her own arm, that was to render her unexpected desolation peculiarly bitter and aggravated. She flattered herself that by her skill she could foresee, and by her power could avert, any calamity that might threaten her. She trusted, or was secure, in her wickedness, saying, “None seeth me,”—a sentiment frequently ascribed in Scripture to presumptuous sinners, who disbelieve the doctrine of providential retribution. Her wisdom and knowledge had perverted her, filling her with pride and presumption, so that she said in her heart, “I am, and none else besides me;” and her punishment, therefore, was to be peculiarly humbling to the pride both of her wisdom and her power. “Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth : and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off : and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.” Babylon is then warned, that when the threatened calamity came upon her, her enchantments and her sorceries would avail her nothing,—that her counsels would produce nothing but perplexity and confusion,—that her astrologers, and star-gazers, and monthly prognosticators, so far from guiding her distracted counsels, or pointing out a way of escape for her, would themselves be overwhelmed in confusion and ruin, even as stubble is consumed by a devouring flame,—and, finally, that she should be deserted of all her foreign friends and allies, who in the day of her prosperity courted her friendship, or sought to enrich themselves by her wealth. “Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth : they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee.”

Such was the destruction which the prophet foresaw was one

day to overtake Babylon ; and from the view here given of the character of that people, their overthrow was one of the many examples, with which the history of the world abounds, of that righteous retribution which, in the providence of God, sooner or later overtakes the growing ungodliness and immorality of nations. Independently of any special sin, whereby the guilt of Babylon might be peculiarly aggravated, there was enough in their general character, as here delineated, to show that, according to the great principles of the divine government, as laid down and illustrated in Scripture, their overthrow as a nation was inevitable. But there was a special sin chargeable against Babylon, which is not only mentioned by the prophet among her other delinquencies, but brought prominently forward as one of the grounds of the sentence which had gone forth against her. It was her cruel treatment of God's people,—the helpless captives of Judah: "I was wroth with my people; I have polluted mine inheritance, and given them into thine hand: thou didst show them no mercy; upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke." God was wroth with his people because of their backsliding, and it was necessary that he should visit their sin with a mark of his righteous displeasure. For this purpose he withdrew the defence which he had created around them,—he permitted the heathen to enter and lay waste their land,—he delivered up their once holy and beautiful city to plunder and to the flames,—and he gave them captives into the hand of the king of Babylon. When Babylon, therefore, carried Judah into captivity, she did thereby fulfil a divine purpose,—she executed a decree which had been frequently announced by the prophets, and which could not fail, therefore, to be carried into effect. But while the Babylonians were thus the instruments whereby God executed his righteous purpose regarding his own sinning and rebellious people, it was from no desire to fulfil his counsel, or to vindicate his truth and faithfulness, that the Babylonians took Jerusalem, burned the city and temple, and carried away the people captive. In all this they were actuated by the love of conquest, and power, and plunder,—by the desire of gratifying the lowest passions of man's corrupt nature. It was with the king of Babylon as it was with the king of Assyria, who was commissioned to execute a similar judgment upon Israel, and of whom we find it written in this same

book, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so,"—that is, he does not think that he is acting according to the will and purpose of God,—"but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. . . . Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom ; for I am prudent."

All this, it is plain, was just as true of the king of Babylon as it was of the king of Assyria ; and, indeed, it is obviously implied in what is here said of the Babylonians. They neither meant nor was it in their heart to honour the God of Israel by executing his will, or to demonstrate his veracity by fulfilling his revealed purpose. It was in contempt of his authority, and in honour of their own idols, that they profaned the temple of the Lord,—robbed it of its treasures,—and carried away its holy vessels to adorn the palace of their king, or to be deposited in the house of their false gods. In all this they did, no doubt, execute God's will, doing what his hand and his counsel determined before to be done ; for through it all, they were under the control of that almighty power and inscrutable wisdom whereby, in a most holy manner, God governs all his creatures and all their actions. But, meanwhile, they were acting according to the dictates of their own will,—seeking the gratification of their own ungodly passions ; and their guilt was the same, therefore, as if nothing had ever been revealed of the divine purpose concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

And that guilt was of a very aggravated nature ; for it appears, from the passage before us, that they were chargeable with great cruelty towards those whom they conquered and took captive : "I was wroth with my people ; I have polluted mine inheritance, and given them into thine hand : thou didst show them no mercy ; upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke." It is probable, indeed, that wherever the

Babylonians were victorious over other nations, their conquests would be marked with great cruelty, as was but too common in those times, and, it is to be feared, in all times. We know, moreover, that they had in the case of Judah what they would think great provocation, inasmuch as Zedekiah, who was king at the time Jerusalem was taken, had at first taken an oath that he would be subject or tributary to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, but afterwards rebelled and courted alliance with Egypt, with the view of being enabled to throw off the yoke which the king of Babylon had imposed upon him ; and it was in consequence of this breach of engagement on the part of Zedekiah that the forces of the king of Babylon again came up against Jerusalem, and ultimately took it, and "burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house, and . . . brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about."

In such circumstances, we can conceive that an irritated conqueror, whose authority had been insulted, and whose pride was wounded, would wreak his vengeance without mercy on those who had ventured to rebel against him. But there was another reason still why we may suppose that Judah would be treated with greater cruelty by the Babylonians than other conquered nations were wont to be. Israel had sometimes been feared and always hated by the heathen because of their religion, in which they asserted the supremacy of Jehovah, as the only living and true God,—thereby bearing witness against the pretensions of false gods. It is true that the people generally had ceased to be faithful witnesses for this great truth, and had thereby forfeited that protection, and those interpositions on their behalf whereby the divine sovereignty had so frequently been demonstrated in the sight of the heathen. And this, in fact, was their great sin, inasmuch as it furnished a plausible ground for the idolatrous nations that defeated them to allege that their idols had triumphed over the God of Israel.

But the Babylonians must have known enough of the history and the religion of the people of Israel to be aware that they held the God of their fathers to be not only above, but opposed to all other gods. We read of ambassadors from the king of Babylon being sent to the court of Hezekiah, king of Judah, at

a time when the destruction of the mighty host of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was still a very recent event, and when it must have been well known that Hezekiah and his people ascribed that terrible overthrow of their enemies to the immediate interposition of Jehovah. During the captivity itself, also, the kings of Babylon, and their people generally, were not left without many testimonies to the supremacy of the God of Israel,—testimonies which extorted from these kings something that approached very near to an acknowledgment of the sovereignty of Jehovah. We cannot read the book of Daniel,—the divine communications that were vouchsafed to him,—the deliverance wrought for himself, and for his three companions in captivity,—and the impression made by these interpositions on the minds of the sovereigns of Babylon, and published by royal edicts throughout the whole empire;—we cannot, I say, peruse the history of all this, without perceiving that the Babylonians were left without excuse if they did not recognise the true God, and see that, in cruelly entreating his captive people, they were daringly defying his power and sovereignty. It was very aggravated guilt, then, that was laid to their charge, when it was said to them, “I have given mine inheritance into thine hand; thou didst show them no mercy; upon the ancients hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke.”

It appears, then, that among the manifold iniquities which characterised Babylon of old, and which could not fail to draw down upon them the righteous judgment of God, their treatment of Judah and Jerusalem was especially offensive in his sight, and could not be permitted to pass without an unequivocal manifestation of his holy displeasure. It was, in fact, a denial of his sovereignty, a daring defiance of his power, an attempt to put down and extinguish the true religion; and, therefore, the vindication of his character, and the maintenance of his supremacy, as the moral governor of the world, required that he should visit such presumptuous rebellion with righteous retribution. Had his own people remained faithful to the high and honourable trust committed to them,—that of being his witnesses,—Babylon had never been permitted to make a conquest of their country, and to carry them away captive. God would have asserted and vindicated his own sovereignty, as he did in the case of Sen-

nacherib, when "the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand." But when Judah, in spite of this mighty deliverance, continued to backslide, and to become more and more faithless to their commission, till it became necessary that judgment should be executed upon them, it became also the more necessary that Babylon should be made to know, that though God's people had been vanquished and carried captive, it was because of their sin in distrusting him, not from any lack of power on his part to defend them. Accordingly, we find it charged upon them as their sin, that when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned God's holy name, when the heathen said to them, "These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land."

Not only, then, was this calumny to be refuted, but the very event that gave rise to it,—namely, the captivity of Judah,—was to be the means of bringing out more clearly the sovereignty and the faithfulness of God. When Jerusalem was destroyed, and the temple burnt, and Judah carried into captivity, it might appear as if the God of Israel had no longer any people on earth to witness for or to worship him. But in the overthrow of the kingdom of Babylon, and in the restoration of the remnant of God's heritage, a new and a most decisive proof was to be given that the God of Israel is the ever living and unchangeable God ; and, accordingly, we find it said by the mouth of another prophet, "I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them ; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land."

The judgment upon Babylon, then, which was foretold in this chapter, was for the vindication of God's sovereignty,—the manifestation of his glory,—the sanctification of his great name in the sight of the heathen ; and viewed simply in this light, it is fitted to awaken the devout and reverential admiration of his people in all times. But in connection with this first and great end of all God's dispensations, his compassion for his people,—the true Church,—is also assigned as a reason for the judgment

which he was to execute upon Babylon. Everywhere, indeed, in Scripture, the manifestation of God's glory is spoken of in connection with the preservation, deliverance, or prosperity of his Church ; and the fact that it is so does very emphatically express the prominent place which the Church occupies in all the divine dispensations towards the world at large. But in the passage before us, God's gracious and compassionate care for his Church is expressed in language peculiarly affecting : "I gave mine inheritance into thine hand : thou didst show them no mercy." The expression implies, that though in his wisdom and rectitude he had seen fit to give his people for a season into the hand of their enemies, yet he did not bid these enemies treat them as they did, and that he looked with great pity and compassion on his suffering people while under the power of their merciless oppressors. No doubt, he foresaw all that they would endure at the hand of their conquerors if they should be given up to them ; and he did give them up in the perfect foreknowledge of all this. But this neither palliated the guilt of those who cruelly entreated them, nor did it prevent the divine compassion and tenderness from flowing forth toward them while they so suffered. And this compassion is here expressed in such a way as it would have been if his people had been subjected to heavier affliction than was intended. This, of course, was impossible. That affliction was not only foreseen, but appointed and measured out by God himself ; and it was, moreover, all necessary for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes towards his people themselves. But with these purposes the guilty perpetrators of cruelty upon Judah had nothing to do. They would have gone beyond what God permitted them to do, if they could ; and he assures his people who were so afflicted, that they were as much the objects of his pity and compassion, and would as certainly experience his interposition on their behalf, as if they had been subjected to suffering beyond what he had designed.

And that such is the import of the language before us is still more evident when we compare it with another declaration in reference to the same subject. In the first chapter of the book of Zechariah, who prophesied soon after the return from Babylon, it is written, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very

sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction." Here the heathen are spoken of still more plainly as having inflicted on God's people cruelties which they were not warranted to inflict; and they are spoken of, too, as if they had carried their oppression beyond what was intended or foreseen. This, as I have already remarked, was impossible; but the employment of such language does very emphatically express the pity and tenderness with which God regarded his suffering and weary heritage.

And how full of consolation must such declarations have been to the faithful remnant in Judah and Jerusalem! To those, indeed, who lived in Isaiah's day, or at any time before the captivity, the words before us must have conveyed a very solemn impression, both of the certainty and the severity of that disastrous event; for they contained a very distinct and a peculiarly impressive prediction, that Judah was to suffer, and suffer most severely, at the hand of Babylon. But, at the same time, they contained an equally explicit and impressive assurance, that God was not to cast off his people for ever, but was again to glorify his great name in their deliverance. And with regard to those of God's true people who were actually carried into captivity, and who experienced all that bitterness of a state of exile, so mournfully expressed in the 137th Psalm, "For they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion;"—with regard to them, how rich in consolation to them must have been the words here recorded, assuring them that they were at that instant regarded with pity and compassion by Him who had promised again to visit and redeem them! They would be ready to acknowledge that, however unjustly and unwarrantably they were dealt with at the hand of their spoilers, they were not suffering more than what was designed, and what they deserved at the hand of God. Daniel's confession, and supplication, and prayer, did, no doubt, express the sentiments of every humble and truly penitent captive in Babylon; and the more humble and penitent that they were, the more largely would they enjoy the consolation of the divine promises.

And should it not be so with God's people still? The emphatic assurance that God looks with pity and compassion on his people

under suffering, was designed for the comfort of the Church in all ages ; for it is as true of his people at all times as it was of his captive people in Babylon. The peculiar circumstances of the Church at that time gave occasion to a very expressive and affecting declaration of this precious truth. But it was always a truth that God afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men ; and it has been unfolded to us now, as it was not to the Church of old, for we are assured that “ we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

XX.

GOD SAVES THE CHURCH FOR HIS OWN NAME'S SAKE.

ISAIAH XLVIII. 1-22.

THIS chapter is to be viewed, I think, in connection with the preceding. There the prophet had foretold the terrible judgment which was one day to overtake Babylon on account of her wickedness generally, and also and especially because of the cruelty with which God foresaw that she was to treat his captive people : “I was wroth with my people ; I have polluted mine inheritance, and given them into thine hand : thou didst show them no mercy ; upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke.” If the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem gave ear at all to any thing that the prophet said, they would, without doubt, be ready, in their perverseness, to misunderstand and abuse a statement like this. It was a statement so strongly expressive of God’s pity and compassion for them, under the cruel treatment which he foresaw they were to experience at the hand of Babylon, that, in their self-righteousness, they might conclude that the threatened suffering was much greater than they deserved ;—or they might allege, perhaps, that God would never permit them to be subjected to an infliction with which he was displeased, and of which he spoke as if it was to go beyond what he designed. There is reason, indeed, to believe that the backsliding multitude,—that is, the great majority of the people,—regarded the prophet’s predictions with indifference, or, at most, were irritated and offended by them. But if they did entertain and reflect upon

them at all, we can hardly doubt, I think, that they would be ready to draw some such false and delusive conclusion as I have supposed, from the gracious declaration referred to. And, moreover, that declaration might suggest some perplexing thoughts even to the faithful in Judah, the remnant of God's true people. When they heard the denunciation of God's righteous displeasure against Babylon, because, when he gave his people into her hand, she showed them no mercy, but heavily oppressed the aged and infirm, who could least resist her, it might appear strange to them that, foreseeing the cruelties which were to be so offensive to him, he should nevertheless permit his people to be vanquished and carried captive, when, with infinite facility, he could have prevented them from being brought into such a condition.

We can easily conceive that some doubtful and harassing question like this might occur even to the faithful in Judah and Jerusalem, those who believed that Isaiah was a true prophet, and who received his word, therefore, as the word of the living God. When we reflect how much there was to discourage and depress them in the growing degeneracy of the times, and in the calamities which were coming on the country, we cannot wonder that the divine dealings might appear mysterious to them, and that they would greatly need to have a full and clear explanation of the principle of these dealings. For their comfort and satisfaction, therefore, as well as for the reproof of the impenitent and unbelieving, God was pleased to explain the ground of his procedure,—to show them that if they were carried away into captivity, it was their sin that brought upon them that grievous calamity,—that the care which had been taken, even from the beginning, to preserve them from idolatry, and his long forbearance when they fell into it, were proofs how unwilling he was to subject them to any such calamity,—that his pity for them, when the bitter consequences of their apostasy did overtake them, was nothing more than a manifestation of the compassion which he had all along exercised towards them,—while, in executing judgment on Babylon, he was vindicating his own sovereignty, which had been called in question in consequence of the captivity of Judah,—and that as at first he had, of his sovereign grace, and from no merit on their part, called them to be his people when they were in a state of the deepest degradation, even in

the iron furnace of Egypt ; so, in the exercise of the same sovereign grace, and with as little merit on their part, he would again visit and redeem them, even for his own sake, that his name might not be profaned, and that he might not give his glory to another.

Such, then, is the design, generally, of the chapter before us. It begins with a call or summons addressed to Judah, to listen to what had just been said, and to what Jehovah was about to say to them. They are described as the house of Jacob, as called by the name of Israel, and as come forth out of the waters of Judah,—that is, as streams from the fountain of Judah ; and they are represented as swearing by the name of the Lord, —that is, avouching him to be their God, but not in truth nor in righteousness. This is the character which the people generally bore, even at the best ; for when they did not openly avow idol worship, but professedly acknowledged the true God, it was not in truth and sincerity. At various periods they did appear to turn from idols unto God, seemingly sensible of the privilege of waiting upon him in the holy city, the place which he had chosen to put his name there, and professedly staying themselves on the God of Israel. But elsewhere in the writings of this same prophet, we find them expressly charged with drawing near unto God with their mouth, and honouring him with their lips, while their heart was far from him.

This, then, was their general character ; and they are here assured that God foresaw that it would be so. Jehovah himself declares, that because he knew that they were obstinate, that their neck was an iron sinew, and their brow brass, ready not only to rebel against him, but to justify their rebellion, and ascribe to false gods what was due only to him ; therefore, from the beginning he had foretold what was to happen to them, lest when it did happen they should say, “ Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them.” Yet, notwithstanding all this, they had been from the beginning treacherous,—they were transgressors from the womb,—from the time that he had called them to be his people. And why, then, were they endured ? It was because he had a purpose to accomplish in and by them ; and that purpose was not to be defeated by their perverseness and folly.

His own glory was involved in the accomplishment of what he had decreed and revealed; and that glory was not to be tarnished because they despised the privilege and the honour of co-operating with him in the fulfilment of his counsel. Therefore it was that he spared them: "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold I have refined," or melted, "thee, but not with silver,"—that is, thou hast not proved to be silver but dross; "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction;"—or, in other words, I chose thee when thou wast in a state of the deepest misery and degradation,—implying that it was on his part an act of sovereign grace, and that so his procedure towards them continued to be: "For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another." So far the object of this address was to convict Judah of having overlooked, or set at nought, the most incontrovertible proofs of the supremacy of the God of Israel, and to compel them to acknowledge that, whatever calamity might overtake them, it was nothing more than they deserved,—nay, that it was because of the Lord's mercies that they had not long before been consumed. Whether they were brought to make this confession or not, they were at all events left without excuse; and with regard to true believers, the faithful remnant in Judah and Jerusalem, they would be ready to acknowledge that, in the very severest of God's judgments, he was justified when he spoke, and clear when he judged.

But hopeless as was the impenitence of the great body of the people, and justly as God might have left them, without any further warning, to reap the fruit of their own doings, and to be filled with their own devices, yet, in the following verses, we find him condescending again to remonstrate with them on their folly, as well as sin, in forsaking Him who had given them so many proofs of his divine foreknowledge and power,—his omniscience and omnipotence,—and betaking themselves to idols, which neither had given nor could give any proof whatever that they either knew, or could do any thing: "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called: I am he: I am the first, I also am the last. Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my

right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together;”—that is, I exercise a sovereign authority over all the creatures which I have formed in heaven and on earth, so that when I call unto them, they stand up together, like servants waiting to receive and to execute their lord’s commandments. An appeal is then made to them whether any of the false gods whom they worshipped had ever given any such proof of their foreknowledge and their power: “All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; which among them,”—that is, among the idols,—“hath declared these things.” And as a new assertion of Jehovah’s knowledge and power, reference is again made to what had already been predicted concerning Cyrus, as destined to fulfil God’s purpose of delivering his captive people: “The Lord hath loved him,”—hath chosen and honoured him,—that is, Cyrus,—with marks of his favour; “he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him; I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous.”

But here another and a mightier deliverer than Cyrus is introduced. Christ himself,—he who from the beginning was revealed to the Church, not only in promises and in ordinances, but also by personal manifestations,—he who appeared to Moses in the bush,—who, as the Angel of the covenant, guided Israel through the wilderness,—and, as the Captain of the Lord’s host, met Joshua in the plains of Jericho,—is here represented as addressing Judah, referring to what he had already done, and foretelling what he was yet to do on their behalf: “Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I.” This declaration is in substance what we find said in the 8th chapter of Proverbs, where Christ thus speaks of himself: “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth. Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways.” It is thus that Christ speaks by the

mouth of Isaiah in the passage before us: "Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now,"—as if he were already come, God manifest in the flesh,—“now the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me;”—or, as it is elsewhere expressed by Christ himself, also in this same book, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek.” This is in substance what is here said: “Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.”

This had been Christ's office from the beginning. He had always been the Word,—the eternal Word,—the Word of God,—the speaker or revealer of God's mind and will: for, as the great Lawgiver and Judge, God could hold no communication with fallen man but through a Mediator,—one who knew all the Father's counsels, and who was able to satisfy all the demands of the Father's justice. Christ had undertaken in the everlasting covenant to do the latter, and was, therefore, qualified to do the former; that is to say, he had undertaken, and, by covenant engagement, had bound himself to do and endure all that was needful to vindicate the honour of God's law, and to satisfy the demands of God's justice; and, therefore, he had a right to reveal to sinners the will of God for their salvation. And he had done so from the beginning, as it is here declared. But from the beginning he had met with waywardness, and folly, and rebellion, even on the part of those whom he had especially taken under his guidance as the angel of the covenant, and to whom he had more than once made himself known by personal manifestations; for often “did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert.” And referring to this their former obstinacy and disobedience, he here gives utterance to a compassionate lamentation over them, “O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.” It has been beautifully remarked of these expressions, that the figure of a river suggests the idea of abundance, perpetuity, or constant flowing, and freshness; and that the figure of the waves of the sea suggests the idea

of vastness, depth, and continual succession. And such would have been the peace and righteousness of Israel, had they hearkened to the commandments of the great Teacher. Moreover, instead of being wasted and reduced in number by the famine, and the pestilence, and the sword, so that when the captivity came, a few thousands only remained to be carried captive,—instead of this, their “seed had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name,” or memory,—that is, the name or memory of Israel,—“should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me.”

And was their name, then, to be cut off? Were they who had so long been God’s covenant people to be utterly exterminated? No. They deserved to be so; but God was faithful to his promise, notwithstanding their faithlessness. He who had from the beginning watched over and cared for them, and who would have led them in the paths of righteousness and peace, was still to interpose, and do for them even greater things than had yet been done; and a renewed promise of deliverance from Babylon is given, as a pledge of a still more glorious interposition, even the fulfilment of all that Christ had undertaken by the covenant of grace to fulfil,—while he refers to their ransom from Egypt, and their journey through the wilderness, as an illustration of the mightier deliverance which was yet to be wrought out for them: “Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob. And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out.” But this great and gracious promise is followed up by a very solemn warning,—a warning which may appear somewhat abruptly introduced, but which was alike necessary and seasonable. It was necessary to warn the impenitent, that God’s threatened judgments would assuredly be executed; and it was seasonable to renew this warning at a time when the promises of God to the true Church were renewed in language so full of encouragement, that the impenitent might not flatter themselves with any participation in the prosperity which yet awaited God’s people, inasmuch as, let outward circumstances be what they may, there can be no true happiness to those that

are far from God. "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked."

The leading subject of this chapter is the sovereign grace and mercy of God, as manifested not only by the original guilt and unworthiness of men, but by the ingratitude even of those who have shared most largely in that mercy. It was in the exercise of this grace that God chose Israel to be his peculiar people, by whom he was to make to himself a name, and a praise, and a glory in the earth. And it was for no foreseen merit in them that he thus chose them; for when the time came at which he was to give effect to his choice, or election,—in other words, when the execution of his gracious purpose required that Israel should be called out and separated from the rest of the world,—there was nothing in their character on which he could look with approbation, or on account of which they could have claimed his interposition. They were, indeed, very miserable; for they were grievously oppressed by Pharaoh, and tortured by the merciless taskmasters whom he set over them. They sighed, accordingly, by reason of their bondage, and they cried. But it does not appear that they cried in faith, or were anxious to escape from the abominations of Egypt, if they could only have had their burden lightened. God, indeed, heard their groaning; but it was because he pitied their misery, and because he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. The people of Israel had no earnest or anxious desire to know God, or to seek in his favour and friendship for their true happiness. Even after Moses had made known to them the God of their fathers, and had given them miraculous proofs that God had sent him to deliver them, and had assured them that he would conduct them to a land flowing with milk and honey,—even after hearing all this, and professing to believe it, they would have been ready to forfeit and lose it all for the sake even of some mitigation of the bitter service wherewith Pharaoh made them to serve; for their language to Moses was, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians." God called them, then, and delivered them, when they had no desire to know and to follow him; or, as it is here expressed, he chose them in the furnace of affliction, in a state of misery and degradation. And even when they were called, and seemingly impressed for a season with a sense of God's marvellous grace and

goodness, they were ever prone to distrust and to forsake him: for even on the very confines of Canaan, their language was, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt."

Nor does their subsequent history afford any evidence of their becoming better and more deserving than their fathers had been. On the contrary, they manifested a growing tendency to degenerate, and to become more rebellious against the Lord; for what is a large portion of this prophet's writings, but just a testimony against the folly and disobedience of his infatuated countrymen? To nothing, then, but sovereign grace can we ascribe the first election, and call, and deliverance of Israel, whereby they became a peculiar people unto God; and to nothing but the same grace can we ascribe it that, instead of being cast off almost as soon as they were delivered, they continued, through many successive generations, to experience the most marvellous interpositions of divine power on their behalf, and to enjoy, to a great extent, the privileges which God had promised to them as his obedient people. But the more clearly to bring out the grace of God, as that to which Israel were indebted for all their privileges and blessings, it is expressly declared that God chose them with the perfect foreknowledge of all the perverseness, and obstinacy, and rebellion, with which they would be chargeable; and that if he did not utterly forsake and cast them off, it was because he had purposed, and had, moreover, proclaimed his purpose, to glorify his own great name in and by them, taking them under his special care, interposing on their behalf, and protecting them in the enjoyment of their peculiar privileges. "I knew," he says, in this chapter, "I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously." "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off."

And what is all this, but an example of God's manner of dealing with men still? In regard to the impenitent and unbelieving,—those who despise his proffered grace, and neglect the great salvation which has been revealed in the Gospel,—they, of course, are the monuments of God's sparing mercy; for it is only because his compassions fail not that they have not been consumed. But where is the true believer that will not readily acknowledge the same thing regarding himself? He, too, was once in a state of impenitence and unbelief; and while he was in that state, every

day and every hour of his life bore testimony to the forbearance and long-suffering patience of God. He will acknowledge, too, that his being brought out of that state was an act of sovereign grace, as much as was the calling of Israel out of Egypt. His conversion to God was no doing of his own. He had neither the power nor the will to do it for himself; and he had no desire that it should be done by another for him. He can remember, perhaps,—many can,—that when the truth was urged upon his attention, and first began to make him uneasy, by awakening some apprehension of danger, he would willingly have turned away from it, and that his sentiment towards the proposal which the Gospel made to him did not differ widely from that of Israel towards the proposal made to them for leaving Egypt, when they said to Moses, “Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians.” The believer will acknowledge that it was of grace alone that his reluctance to entertain the Gospel was overcome; and that so far from there being any thing in him on account of which he has received the forgiveness which has not been extended to others, he actually resisted God’s gracious purpose of turning him from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that so he might receive the forgiveness of sin, and inheritance among them that are sanctified, by faith that is in Christ Jesus. It will never cease, indeed, to be, in the estimation of the true believer, a very affecting proof of the sovereignty of divine grace, that it contended with his perverse will, seeking to save him when he was unwilling to be saved; and that when he was made willing, the persuasive power that made him so was divine.

But if it was grace alone that first made him to differ, he will acknowledge that on the same grace he depends for the permanency of the privileges to which he has been called; and whatever progress he may have made in the divine life, whatever there may be in his character of resemblance to Christ, he will be ready to say, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” He will read, in the history of the waywardness and backsliding of Israel, a faithful representation, if not of his own actual doings, at least of his tendencies; for though he may have been kept from such palpable and aggravated inconsistencies as were chargeable upon that people, yet he will acknowledge that, like them, he has been prone to forget and to forsake God; that if

he were dealt with as he deserved, God would have forsaken and cast him off; that it is of the Lord's mercies that he has not been consumed. The believer will, in like manner, read in the history of God's forbearance and long-suffering patience towards Israel, a representation of what he himself has experienced; for whatever may have been the chastisement with which from time to time he has been visited, or however sharp the trials to which he has been subjected, he will acknowledge that the Lord hath not dealt with him as he sinned. When he reflects how much the prevalence of worldly motives and sinful affections in his heart has retarded his spiritual growth, and how frequently they have marred his spiritual comfort, he will feel that he might be addressed as Israel were in this passage: "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." And when he remembers who it was that gave utterance to this compassionate language,—even Christ himself,—he will acknowledge that if it was fitted to melt Judah of old into shame and godly sorrow, it ought to be still more impressive and affecting to him, inasmuch as the compassion and love of the Saviour has been revealed now as it was not and could not be to the Church in Old Testament times. And when believers thus contemplate what the grace of God has done for them,—how it at first triumphed over their obstinacy, and has since borne with their ingratitude,—how it has continued to provide the means of their spiritual improvement, making the Word quick and powerful for reproof, or for correction, or for instruction and encouragement, as their circumstances might require,—and how it adapted the discipline to which they were subjected to their worldly condition outwardly, and to the state of their inward man;—when they think of all this, how humbled and chastened in spirit should they be! and how ready to say with the Church of old, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake!"

But if the passage before us furnishes abundant matter where-with true believers may be profitably exercised, it contains also a statement which mere nominal Christians, the careless and the self-secure, would do well seriously to ponder. I refer to the solemn declaration with which this chapter closes: "There is

no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked." This momentous truth, as we have seen, was added immediately after the announcement of a new and a very glorious manifestation of the divine power and faithfulness towards the Church,—even a deliverance of which the restoration of the captivity from Babylon was to be a pledge, and the redemption from Egypt was but a type. And it would appear that the purpose for which these solemn words were added was to warn the impenitent against flattering themselves that they would have any lot or portion in the exceeding great and precious promises which were here given to the Church,—the glorious things that were spoken of Zion.

And if such a warning was needful then, it is not less so now. Men are still as unwilling as ever they were to believe that they are as guilty and as deserving of punishment as the Scriptures say that they are; and, therefore, they are as prone as ever to misunderstand or explain away those declarations which would convict them of guilt, and awaken an apprehension of danger. And if men are thus willing to be deluded, they will never want arguments whereby to justify their delusion, and strengthen themselves in it. The very Gospel itself will be easily perverted for this purpose. Every one, of course, knows that the Gospel speaks of the love and mercy of God to sinners; that it is a revelation of the grace of God for the salvation of the guilty; that it proclaims peace on earth, and good-will to men. These, and many similar statements regarding the nature and design of the Gospel, must be familiar to all who have ever read, or heard, or thought of the subject at all. But there is reason to fear that multitudes have no desire to know more of this subject than what is expressed by such statements, and, moreover, that they rest satisfied with a very vague and indistinct notion of the meaning of these statements themselves. Very many, I fear, have seen little or nothing more in such declarations than merely an announcement of the truth that God is merciful; and neither knowing nor wishing to know much more than this,—fancying that they know and believe the Gospel,—they will assuredly pervert it to their self-deception, and, if grace prevent not, to their final ruin. It is true that God is merciful, but not in the sense in which they understand the expression. They mean by "merciful," his passing by sin without punishment, because his compassion and tender

ness could not bear to inflict that punishment. But this is not mercy; it is weakness. It is saying that God is so compassionate to the sinner, or rather, so indulgent to sin, that he cannot be just,—cannot execute the sentence of his own righteous law. God is not merciful in this sense. He is merciful only in a way consistent with his justice, holiness, rectitude, and truth. And the Gospel itself,—that which is pre-eminently the revelation of his grace and mercy,—furnishes the most decisive and striking evidence of this. There the mercy of God is manifested in providing a Saviour for sinners, a Mediator between himself and the fallen guilty children of men; and when we reflect that this Mediator was no other than his only begotten Son,—his equal,—the second person in the adorable Godhead, we see and are constrained to acknowledge that the mercy which could provide such a Saviour was indeed divine and infinite.

But when this Saviour appeared to carry into effect the mediatorial work which he had undertaken, what mercy was manifested towards him? Was he spared any of the suffering which arose from the infliction of the punishment due to sinners, and, therefore, due to him who voluntarily, and with the full consent of the great Lawgiver, stood in their place? Was any thing remitted to him of what the divine law denounced against transgression? Did the Saviour, the Mediator, the only begotten and well beloved of the Father, escape the pain of enduring the threatened punishment, because the Father was too compassionate, too tender, too full of pity to inflict it? Let the Saviour's own words answer this question: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;"—"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;"—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" There is in this language a very terrible proof that God both can and will inflict all that he has threatened against sin. Were he merciful in the sense in which men would wish to believe that he is, Christ never would have suffered as he did suffer; and his suffering is, therefore, an awful warning to those who are relying on some vague notion of the divine mercy, and so saying, Peace, peace, to themselves, when there is no peace. It is not in some loose and indefinite notions of the divine pity and compassion that true peace or rest is to be found, but in that vital union with Christ by faith, in virtue

whereof the sinner is clothed in the Redeemer's righteousness, —a righteousness wrought out by the doing of all that the law required, and the endurance of all that it denounced against sin; and being so clothed, he is pardoned and accepted, in perfect consistency with all the perfections of the divine character. Till sinners are thus brought to Christ, and united to him, they are still in their sins,—still numbered among those who are here denominated the wicked; and to them, therefore, the warning before us is addressed, and its truth most solemnly demonstrated in the cross of Christ, "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked."

XXI.

CHRIST MOURNS OVER THE UNBELIEF OF THE JEWS.

ISAIAH XLIX. 4.

THERE can be no doubt, I think, that the person who is represented as speaking at the commencement of this chapter is Christ, and that what he says refers to the execution of his mediatorial undertaking. In the first three verses, the person who speaks employs language in reference to himself, which, according to the usual phraseology of Scripture, is applicable only to Christ: "Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; and said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Of these expressions it may be remarked, that besides being employed elsewhere in Scripture on occasions when Messiah only could be meant, they are in themselves peculiarly applicable to his character and office. And with regard to the name Israel, Christ is so called, not only because the salvation of Israel, or the Church, was the great object of all the divine dispensations and of Messiah's own appearing, but because the Church is one with Christ,—“his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” And that Christ is the person who speaks is still farther evident from what is stated in a subsequent verse: “Now saith the Lord that formed

me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

Of this prediction it will be recollected, not only that the substance of it is to be found elsewhere in the writings of the prophets, but that it is frequently referred to, and twice expressly quoted, in the New Testament, as descriptive of the work and office of the Messiah. It was for the fulfilment of this prophecy that Simeon gave thanks, when, agreeably to the special promise that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, he was led by the Spirit into the temple, when the child Jesus was brought thither, and when "he took him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." And, in like manner, Paul and Barnabas thus referred to the same prediction, in their address to the Jews at Antioch: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."

Some, indeed, have supposed that the prophet speaks, especially in the 4th verse, in his own person, and in reference to his own office, as commissioned to reveal the will and make known the character of God, as well as to the treatment which he experienced at the hand of his countrymen, and that the events which he foretells were fulfilled when God turned again the captivity of Judah. But though the dispensations of God's providence towards the Jews were so framed as to be themselves prophetic of the still more glorious events that were to take place in Gospel times,—and though in this way the office to which the prophet had been set apart, and the events which were to follow the predictions which he delivered, might be typical of the Messiah and of the events of his reign, so that the

same language might, to a certain extent, be applicable to both, —yet, for the full and true import of such a passage as that before us, we must refer to Christ, as the writers of the New Testament have expressly taught us to do. If they have told us that a portion of this passage is the language of Christ, speaking by the mouth of his prophet, with a reference to himself, and to the execution of his mediatorial office, then the very structure of the passage forbids us to ascribe the words of the 4th verse exclusively to any other person, or to confine the application of them to any other subject; and though the language may appear applicable to the prophet, and to the reception which he met with from his countrymen, yet we cannot doubt, I think, that it is Christ himself who says, “I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain.”

And it is in reply to this complaint that the exceeding great and precious promises which form the remainder of this chapter are addressed to Messiah and his Church. In the first instance, these promises are addressed to Messiah himself, assuring him not only that he should, as Jehovah’s servant, restore the desolations of Israel, but should carry salvation to the Gentiles, even unto the end of the earth. At the 14th verse, Zion, or the Church, is represented as giving way to despondency, under an apprehension that God had forsaken and forgotten her; and this complaint is, in like manner, met by new and very rich promises, assuring her of a coming time of prosperity unspeakably surpassing all that had ever before been witnessed. These promises occupy the greater part of the remainder of the chapter, which closes with a very solemn threatening addressed to the enemies of Zion, and with a renewed assurance of God’s unchangeable faithfulness to his people, with whose protection and ultimate deliverance his glory was inseparably connected: “All flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

These promises or predictions of the future prosperity and glorious extension of the Church may be considered as all called forth in reply to the complaint recorded in the 4th verse: “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain.” To this subject, then, I would at present confine myself.

And the question naturally occurs, On what account, and in what sense, could such a declaration be made by Christ? The language is obviously expressive of something like disappointment, as if he had entered on an undertaking in which he had proved unsuccessful, or had expended his strength for what had not been found to be an adequate recompence. And although, in the last clause of the verse, there is the expression of assured confidence that his work would not go unrewarded, still, it may appear difficult to conceive how the complaint expressed in the first clause could have been uttered by Him of whom it has been declared, that he finished the work which his Father gave him to do,—that he “spoiled principalities and powers,” and “made a show of them openly,”—that he ascended up on high, leading captivity captive;—and that because of his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, God “hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.” The difficulty, however, will disappear, if we reflect that the holy human soul of Christ, during the days of his flesh, was susceptible of all the pain and suffering of which the purest affections and emotions may, in certain circumstances, be a very fruitful source; and, bearing this in mind, if we advert to the history of his personal ministry,—the treatment which he experienced at the hand of the Jews,—and the language in which he did himself speak of the enmity and unbelief with which his doctrine was met and resisted. It was foretold of him by this same prophet, that he would be despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and enough has been recorded concerning him, in the Gospel history, to show that not a little of the sorrow with which his holy human soul was afflicted, arose from the unbelief of those to whom he made the gracious offer of the blessings of his salvation. It is said of him that he marvelled because of the unbelief of the Jews, and was grieved for the hardness of their heart. He complained of them that they would not come to him that they might have life. The distrust which was, on some occasions, manifested by the disciples, was obviously painful and offensive to him. And when he contemplated the final impenitency of the great body of the Jewish nation, and foresaw the terrible consequences in which it was to involve them, he gave utterance to language expressive at once of the

most ardent desire to have accomplished their conversion, and of the most profound compassion for the blindness and infatuation which rejected his gracious proposals: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

There is no disappointment, then, expressed in the verse before us, but what we find our Lord himself elsewhere expressing, and no greater difficulty, therefore, in conceiving the words before us to be the words of Christ, than there is in ascribing to him what he was often heard to say during his manifestation in the flesh. There is, however, one passage in the Gospel history which is still more strikingly parallel to the passage before us than those already quoted, and where our Lord not only expresses the same compassionate regret that, with so many of the Jews, his miracles, and doctrine, and affectionate remonstrances had been utterly unavailing, but obviously finds comfort to his holy human soul, and encouragement to proceed in his work of love and mercy, in the same consideration to which he is represented, in the last clause of this verse, as having recourse, in order to console and sustain him under the disappointment expressed in the first clause. I refer to the discourse which he addressed to certain of the Jews who had followed him to Capernaum, in consequence of having witnessed his miracle of feeding five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes. By that miracle, there had obviously been awakened in their minds a hope that, instead of exercising his divine power, as he had previously done, in healing the diseases and ministering to the comfort of individuals only, he was about to do something for them in their national capacity; for we are told of them that when they saw that miracle, they were about to take him by force to make him king. When they found, however, that there was no ground for any such hope, they began to depreciate the very miracle by which their hope had been excited. They compared it with what had been done for their fathers when they were fed with manna in the wilderness, obviously conceiving that our Lord's miracle could not fail to suffer by the comparison. They demanded of him some other

or similar sign, that they might see and believe him to be the deliverer of Israel. And when he spoke of the true bread which his Father gave them from heaven, they replied, "Evermore give us this bread." To this our Lord answered, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." And then follow the words which express the same sentiments which are contained in the verse before us, "But I said unto you, that ye also have seen me, and believe not,"—evidently implying that their unbelief was of the most obdurate and hopeless nature; that they had resisted the clearest evidence which it was possible to give them,—even that of actually seeing Him who was the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, and yet did not believe; and that if the success of his mediatorial undertaking depended on their being persuaded to believe on him, the work in which he was engaged would go altogether unrewarded. But hopeless as their condition was, and compassionately as he did lament it, there was, notwithstanding, a glorious reward wherewith his mediatorial labours and sufferings were to be crowned; and to this his holy soul was evidently looking with complacency and satisfaction, when he immediately added, "All that the Father hath given me shall come to me; and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." It is on the same principle, then, that we are to explain the passage before us. Contemplating the treatment which he was to experience at the hand of sinners,—the obduracy of unbelief with which his words were to be rejected,—and the contempt with which all the expressions of his divine love were to be set at nought or misinterpreted,—contemplating all this, he foresaw that he would have reason to say, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain." But looking, on the other hand, to the immutability of the divine counsel, and the faithfulness of Him who had promised to give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for his possession, he could also say, "Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my reward is with my God."

The view which we have now taken of the passage, besides agreeing with what we find elsewhere stated in Scripture, is farther confirmed, I think, by the following verses: "And now,"

saith the Lord, that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength." "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee." Nothing, I think, can make it plainer than these declarations do, that not a little of the suffering which our Lord endured in the execution of his mediatorial work arose from the painful reflection, that they whom he laboured to convince of their guilt and danger, and before whom he exhibited every demonstration of his divine compassion, did nevertheless reject the counsel of God against themselves,—that besides the actual inflictions which he endured at their hands, in the way of reproach, and calumny, and persecution, his profound views of their miserable state, and of the fearful accumulation of guilt which they contracted in consequence of rejecting him, proved a source of affliction to his holy and compassionate soul, of which we can form but a very feeble conception,—and that, on the other hand, the contemplation of the reward which, by the eternal covenant, had been secured to him, in the salvation of those whom the Father had given him, constituted no small portion of the joy that was set before him, and for the sake of which he willingly endured the cross, despising the shame. Enough, I think, has already been stated, both from the language of prophecy, and from the history of our Lord's personal ministry, to show that all this is implied in the verse under consideration; and nobody who has read that history with serious attention, and who really believes it, can fail to be convinced, that there was in the mind of Christ towards the Jews, who rejected, and crucified, and put him to death, a sentiment of compassion and regret corresponding to the language of this verse, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain."

But though these words were originally spoken with a special view, in the first instance, to the case of the Jews, and were, in fact, as we have already seen, substantially repeated by himself during his personal ministry among them, yet the very nature of

the thing forbids us to suppose that it was their unbelief alone that he contemplated, and over which he poured out such expressions of compassionate regret. It was in the case of the Jews that the rejection of God's method and terms of reconciliation was to be first and most palpably manifested; and it was a befitting thing, therefore, that the consequences of this rejection should be in the first instance set forth with a special reference to them. But wherever the Gospel has been preached, there has been held out to every sinner as faithful and honest an offer of all the blessings of salvation as ever was made to the Jews. The moment that offer is made to them, a very great and important change takes place in their circumstances, inasmuch as it must prove to them either the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death. And as unbelief in such circumstances can never be any thing else than making God a liar, its malignity and offensiveness, as it appears to Christ, must in every case be the same. In fact, the language of the verse before us, as well as of many other passages of Scripture, where our Lord is represented as lamenting the unbelief of the finally impenitent, and as rejoicing over those who should be persuaded to take refuge in his grace, is to be regarded as expressing the estimate which he forms of the misery of the one class, and the blessedness of the other. That estimate, being formed by infinite wisdom and unerring truth, must be the same whether it be exemplified in Jews or Gentiles. And we cannot doubt, therefore, that there is a reference to unbelievers generally, as well as to the impenitent Jews, in the declaration before us: "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain."

I am aware that the consideration now stated may be made light of by those who have never really believed the Gospel, or with whom it has never been any thing more than the subject of cold and unprofitable speculation; and that so long as they are but half convinced of the truth, or satisfied with giving to it a cold and unmeaning consent, there will be nothing real, and therefore nothing affecting to them, in representing their unbelief as the subject of such a complaint on the part of Christ as that which is recorded in the verse before us. It is fit, however, that unbelievers should be told of the full extent of their guilt and danger; for certain it is, whether they believe it or no, that

in rejecting the proposals of the Gospel, they do all that they can do towards defeating the purposes of the Redeemer's mercy, and giving occasion to say respecting his mediatorial undertaking, "I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought."

But whatever such persons may think of the statement in this verse, it is one which believers should frequently contemplate, and earnestly endeavour to realise, inasmuch as it is fitted to place in a very affecting light the love and compassion of the Saviour,—his intentness on the great work of saving sinners,—and the holy complacency with which he contemplates the success of his undertaking, when they are brought cordially to receive, and unreservedly to confide in him. The general truth, that he came to seek and to save that which was lost,—that he gave his life a ransom for many,—that he suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring sinners unto God,—is a truth which is, no doubt, full of consolation and encouragement to every believing soul, and ought to command the love, and gratitude, and confidence of all to whom such gracious intelligence is proclaimed. But when Christ, in speaking of this his mediatorial work, employs such language as that in the passage before us,—when he speaks of the unbelief of sinners, and of their rejection of him, as we know and feel that we ourselves would speak of an ill-requited act of generosity and kindness,—and when he dwells on the faith, and love, and gratitude of those who do believe in him, and speaks of their participation in all the blessings of his salvation, as an adequate reward for all that he did and endured in working out that salvation,—he gives to the expression of his love a force and an emphasis which general statements do not possess, and which is fitted to convey a very vivid impression of the reality and depth of his divine compassion. To those who have felt the power of such a representation of the Saviour's love, it is hardly necessary to observe in what an aggravated light it places the sin of unbelief. It represents unbelief not only as rejecting a divine testimony, and calling in question the most solemn and best-accredited declarations of eternal truth, but as setting at nought the most affecting manifestations of a divine compassion, and treating with indifference the tenderest expressions of a divine love. And though in many of the forms, therefore, which unbelief assumes,

it is but too frequently regarded rather as a weakness than as a sin, is it not evident that it is in reality the most heinous of all sins? But if the verse under consideration is fitted to exhibit the guilt of unbelief, it is also calculated to operate powerfully in removing it, inasmuch as it bears witness not only to Christ's willingness to save, but to the intentness of desire with which he longed to carry into effect the divine counsels of peace on behalf of sinners. And did we study, then, to realise, and habitually to remember the truth and import of this passage,—did we receive it with simplicity, as meaning all that it says respecting the mind of Christ towards sinners, the compassion with which he regards the impenitent, and the complacency with which he looks on and rejoices over them that repent,—and did we surrender ourselves to the impression which this view of the Saviour's character is fitted to make on our hearts, oh, how many unworthy thoughts and guilty suspicions would it not prevent or quickly dissipate!—from how many doubts, and perplexities, and fears, as dishonouring to him as they are destructive of our own comfort, would it not deliver us!—and instead of the distrust and misgiving which tend so much to chill our affections, and serve so frequently to fetter us in our obedience, with what confidence would it not lead us to repose in his love, and confide in his righteousness!—and what enlargement of heart would it not give us to run in the way of the divine commandments!

But the verse which we are considering, as I have now endeavoured to explain it, admits of another practical application. If it was with a reference to the state of unbelievers generally, the multitudes by whom he foresaw that his salvation was to be despised or neglected, that our Lord said, in these words, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought,"—and if this consideration goes incalculably to augment the guilt of those who do for themselves despise the Gospel,—does it not bear hard also upon the Christian, who, while he knows and believes the truth, feels little concern, and takes but little trouble, and makes but few sacrifices, to have that truth presented to his fellow-men. We have already seen, both from prophecy and Gospel history, that the words before us were spoken by Christ, with a reference in the first instance to the Jews, whose impenitence and unbe-

lief he foresaw, and directed his prophet to foretell, in the same language of compassionate lamentation in which he was afterwards to speak of them in the days of his flesh; and we have also seen with what good reason that language was applied to them. But when we bear in mind that the Gospel, being fully revealed and distinctly recorded, has been committed to the keeping of mankind themselves,—that it is the expressly declared will of its divine Author, that it should be preached to every creature under heaven,—and that both the Word and the providence of God do most distinctly intimate that this is never to be accomplished but by its transmission through human agency, from kingdom to kingdom, and from one generation to another;—and when, with all this, we reflect how little comparatively has been done towards effecting this object,—how seldom the publication of the words of eternal life has found a place among the many motives which have led one nation to cultivate intercourse with another,—and how small a portion this, the greatest and most important of all undertakings, has hitherto engaged of the enterprise and the energies even of countries professedly Christian;—when we think of all this, does it not appear as if there had been an universal conspiracy against the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom and glory in the world? And contemplating the guilty negligence which mankind have manifested in distributing the heavenly treasure, which some of them, at least, have never been without, may we not suppose that it was with reference to this, as well as to the unbelief of the Jews, that it was said in the words of the verse before us, “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought?”

The Christian cannot regard these questions as trivial, or the subject as one with which he has no personal concern. Though the subject is neither new nor uninteresting to him, he may perhaps find on examination that it has occupied less of his thoughts, and found a place less frequently in his prayers, than it ought to have done; and that on this point he is still very far indeed from having the same mind in him which was in Christ Jesus. And if he finds it to be so, it cannot fail to awaken a more lively interest in the cause which has been so long and so generally neglected; nor will the limited extent to which the Gospel has hitherto been received among men operate otherwise

than as an excitement to zeal and activity. Whatever there may be of mystery in such a state of things being permitted so long to exist, he will not fail to perceive that the immediate reason why it is so is just the indifference and neglect of mankind themselves in employing the obvious and simple means of transmitting the Gospel from one country to another; and while, by this indifference, they are chargeable with having given their consent to the progress of the Redeemer's kingdom being arrested or retarded, the believer will perceive also that the extension of that kingdom must be identified with the kindling of a better spirit. His efforts, it is true, may have many difficulties to encounter, and many a depressing discouragement to sustain; and it may appear at times that he has reason to say, I too am labouring in vain, and spending my strength for nought. But as the exertions of Christians, whether ministers or private members of the Church, are involved in the ultimate triumph of the truth, these exertions cannot be lost. The verse before us contains a pledge, on which the believer may rely, that the Redeemer shall be crowned with the honour and glory of subjugating all nations to his spiritual government; and both as it regards the Saviour, with whose cause the believer's interests are bound up, and as it respects the recompence with which grace will hereafter reward his own work of faith and labour of love, he may also say, "Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God."

XXII.

THE PROMISES OF GOD'S MERCY ARE SURE.

ISAIAH L. 1-11.

IN the preceding chapter, we find recorded exceeding great and precious promises addressed to the Church, in reply to her complaint that Jehovah had forsaken her, and that her Lord had forgotten her. She was assured that though for a season there might appear to be good ground for the complaint, inasmuch as a time of great disaster and seeming desertion awaited her, yet Jehovah's love and faithfulness were unchangeable, and would be manifested in the mighty deliverance which would be wrought for her, and in the glorious enlargement which she was to experience when the Lord turned again her captivity. Not only is the divine love, of which she was the object, set forth in language of the most affecting tenderness, being represented as stronger and more enduring than that of a woman for her sucking child, but her future prosperity is foretold as far surpassing any thing that she had previously experienced. She is represented in her affliction under the figure of a widow bereaved and childless, sitting desolate and forlorn ; and she is assured that she would nevertheless be yet the mother of a family more numerous and more joyful than ever : " For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears,

The place is too strait for me : give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro?"—that is, an exile and a wanderer,—“and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?” But not only was she to be delivered, and gathered from the countries whither she had been carried captive; her very oppressors were to become her deliverers, and were to act towards her as if they felt it to be their honour and their privilege to restore her and her children to the inheritance from which she had been carried away; nay, those who had spoiled her would be brought to do her homage as if she were their sovereign: “Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.” These were very great and glorious things that were spoken concerning Zion, or the Church. But they were not enough to remove all her fears and misgivings. So depressed and discouraged was she to be under her affliction, so hopeless was her state of captivity and desertion to appear, and so numerous and powerful her enemies, that it would seem to her impossible that she could experience such a marvellous deliverance. And, accordingly, she is represented as again giving utterance to her fears, by asking whether she could hope that, having become a prey to those who had oppressed and carried her captive, she could be ransomed and set at liberty. “Shall the prey,” she asks, “be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?” Yes, is the gracious answer: “For thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

It will be observed respecting these promises, that they all imply or assume that Judah as a nation, and, of course, the true Church, which formed a part of the nation, and shared, therefore, in its outward calamities, was to be brought very low, being given up for a season to the power of the enemy, and greatly oppressed. Such a state of things, therefore, would seem to imply that God had cast off his people, and that he had disannulled the covenant which he had made with Israel, and in which he had declared himself to be her husband. This, indeed, was what it is here foretold the Church would fear in the season of her calamity, when she would say, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." She would be ready to surrender herself to the depressing thought that she was as one whom her husband had divorced and put away for ever; and it was to remove this desponding suspicion that the precious promises recorded in the preceding chapter were addressed to her. But as if there were still some lingering feeling of distrust in her mind, notwithstanding these promises, the prophet, still speaking in the name of Jehovah, proceeds in the chapter before us to assure the Church, and believers individually, that God had not broken or forgotten his covenant: "Thus saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away." As if he had said, You are, indeed, for the time, as a mother who has been divorced or put away by her husband,—or as children whom their father has sold to satisfy the demands of his creditors. But it is not because I have broken my covenant, or altered the thing that is gone out of my lips; but because you have been unfaithful. If you are as children who have been sold, you have been sold by yourselves,—it is the effect of your own iniquities. If your mother be as one divorced, it is your doing; for your transgressions she has been put away.

The figurative language in which God's temporary rejection of his people is here described must have been peculiarly expressive to the Church of old, being evidently borrowed from legal transactions with which they were familiar,—namely, the law and custom of divorce, and the law and custom of imprisonment for debt.

One of the most frequently employed figures, indeed, by which the backsliding of God's people was set forth, is the unfaithfulness of a wife, in consequence of which it became necessary, for the vindication of the divine rectitude, that they should be for a season cast off, and, as it were, disowned. But this rejection of them is always spoken of as God's strange work, and as if he had been unwilling so to deal with them. Thus, it is said, in the prophecies of Hosea, "And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal." And, in like manner, in the passage before us, God condescends to reason with his people, to show them that they themselves were alone to blame if he withdrew from them the protection which he had promised them, and gave them up to the power of the enemies against whom he had engaged to defend them: "Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer?" God had come to them by his prophets, declaring to them his will; and he had come to them by his providence, teaching them experimentally that in cleaving to him they abode in a sanctuary of safety, and that in forsaking him they forsook their own mercies. But they did not believe his word,—they did not confide in his power and faithfulness. His gracious communications to them were not met by gratitude and confidence on their part. And he puts it to them, whether their distrust was not in itself alike impious and unreasonable, considering the manifold proofs which he had given to them and to their fathers of his absolute supremacy, and proofs, moreover, furnished by his gracious interpositions on their behalf: "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea,"—as he did for Israel when they entered on their journey to Canaan,—"I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering." The immediate object of this remonstrance was to convince God's people that their disbelief of his word and their distrust of his

power were the procuring cause of all the calamities that might befall them; and that if for a season he had forsaken them, they had no ground to allege that he had broken his covenant, or been unfaithful to his word,—nay, that his very faithfulness required him to act towards them as he did: for they could not but know that the very severest of the judgments which overtook them, even captivity itself, was nothing more than what had from the beginning been most expressly denounced in the event of their forgetting and forsaking God.

But while the reasoning which God condescended to address to his people in these verses was designed, in the first instance, to vindicate his procedure towards them, and to convince them that he was faithful to his covenant, and that they had dealt treacherously, it was designed also to revive their faith, to secure again their confidence, and to reassure their heart towards him. This is obvious from the great and gracious promises recorded in the preceding chapter; for it was to remove any lingering doubt regarding the fulfilment of these promises that the people of God were addressed in the verses before us. They were thus assured that the very calamities which were coming upon them, and under which they would be ready to despond, would prove in the end to be manifestations of the divine faithfulness, and tokens of God's gracious designs towards them, inasmuch as these calamities were the discipline which he saw to be wise and needful for convincing them of their folly as well as sin in distrusting God, for bringing them into an humble and contrite frame of spirit, for teaching them to say with unfeigned penitence, and with a lively sense of the divine forbearance, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now," and for thus preparing and qualifying them for the enjoyment of that fellowship with God which they had for a time forfeited and lost. I do not inquire to what particular calamities in the history of Israel these predictions referred, or in what special deliverances they were fulfilled. There were two very marked occasions, subsequently to the time of Isaiah, on which the covenant people of God seemed to be cast off, or, in the emphatic language of the passage before us, when the mother was put away, and when the children were sold to their creditors. The first was the captivity of Judah by the

king of Babylon; and the second was the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews among all nations, subsequently to their rejection and crucifixion of Christ. With regard to the former, it was followed by a great deliverance, when God stirred up Cyrus, king of Persia, to set at liberty the captive children of Judah,—thus making the mightiest monarch then on earth the instrument of restoring God's people to their country and their privileges. With regard to the latter, it will one day be followed by a far more glorious deliverance, when God will again visit and redeem his people; when the Deliverer who has come out of Zion shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; when those who have long been scattered shall again be gathered; and when, as their casting away was the reconciling of the world, the receiving of them will be life from the dead. I do not doubt,—it cannot, I think, be doubted,—that the prediction in the verses under consideration, and in the preceding chapter, did refer to both of these disastrous periods in the history of the Jews, and to the glorious deliverances with which they were to be followed.

But the prophecy, I think, is not to be exclusively applied to these cases, remarkable as they are. It is a general truth which is here set forth,—namely, that if at any time God appears to have forsaken his people, and to have forgotten the promises on which he encouraged them to rely, it is because he sees that they need such chastisement; and so far, therefore, from being any proof of a change of purpose towards them on his part, it is, on the contrary, a token of his favour,—an evidence of their adoption,—a proof that he is dealing with them as he has always dealt with his children. I do not say that chastisement is the only object of the trials and afflictions which may be appointed to God's people, either collectively as the Church, or as individuals; though I believe that they who have profited most by such trials will be the first to acknowledge that they needed them all as chastisement, however severe it might be. But even if affliction were not specially needed in the way of chastening, it never is sent but for a kind and gracious purpose, even that of making known to them the grace, and power, and faithfulness of God, to an extent which support under affliction or deliverance from it could alone teach them. And if they will but endure meekly

and wait patiently, they will in due time be convinced of this, and will acknowledge it with gratitude. But if they give way to distrust, and become fretful and impatient, then the reproof recorded in the passage before us is designed for them : “ Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver ?”

The chief object of these first three verses, as I have already observed, is to resolve, and, of course, to reprove any remaining doubt that might linger in the minds of God’s people regarding the fulfilment of the promises which had been previously given them, by showing them that all their calamities were of their own procuring, and assuring them that when, by means of these calamities, they were brought into a penitent frame of mind, he would be as ready, as he was able, to help and deliver them. And all this was spoken by Jehovah, as it were in the hearing of the prophet, who was commanded to rehearse it in the ears of the Church. But in the next, that is, in the fourth and following verses, the prophet hears and rehearses the words of Messiah speaking peace and comfort to his people. As if assuming that they were convinced, by the reasoning that had been addressed to them, of their backsliding and sin, and were anxious again to enjoy a comforting sense of the divine favour, Christ addresses them by the mouth of the prophet,—telling them the gracious purpose of his mission, the difficulties which he had to encounter in executing the office which had been assigned to him, the sufferings which he had to endure in accomplishing his work, and his unalterable purpose of accomplishing that work, whatever reproach, or ignominy, or suffering it might cost him. And how full is the description which Messiah here gives of himself ! and how accurately does it correspond with what he did and endured in the days of his manifestation in the flesh ! “ The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” In a subsequent part of this book, we find a similar announcement made of himself by Christ, when he says, “ The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek,”—or, “ a word in season to him that is weary.” And in the days of his flesh, when he read that same passage in the synagogue at Nazareth, and began to say unto

them that heard him, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears," we are told that "all bare him witness,"—carnal and ungodly as they afterwards proved to be,—“all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.” Similar testimonies were borne to his teaching on other occasions, as when it was said that the people were “astonished at his doctrine, for his word was with power,”—or when those who were sent by the council to take him were constrained to say, “Never man spake like this man.” And if such was the effect of the Saviour’s teaching on those who, there is reason to fear, were not converted by it,—if even they could not withhold their admiration of the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth,—what must his doctrine have been to the humble, penitent, and downcast in spirit? what but emphatically a word in season to the weary?

But need I refer to what must have been felt by such persons in hearing the Saviour’s teaching? Does not the experience of many a mourner in Zion still bear testimony to the precious truth in the passage before us? Is it not the word of Christ, accompanied by the power of the Spirit, that gives rest to the weary and the heavy laden, when they are enabled to receive, as addressed to themselves, his gracious invitation to come to him? Is it not the word of Christ, even the blessed assurance, “My grace is sufficient for thee,” that imparts new strength and vigour to many a depressed soul, struggling against temptation, or ready to sink under the burden of difficult and self-denying duties? And is it not the same word, even the gracious declaration that their great High Priest is touched with a feeling of their infirmities, and sympathises in all their sorrows, that imparts consolation to believers under the manifold trials and bereavements to which they are here exposed? So true is it still, and ever will be, that he knows “how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” This, then, is the gracious office to which Christ here says that he was appointed, even to bring a message of peace to sinners,—to reveal to them the will of God for their salvation. This message, or revelation, he received from the Holy Spirit, wherewith he was anointed to preach glad tidings to the meek. And he willingly undertook to be the bearer of this message, the preacher of these glad tidings. “He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the

learned;" that is, The Lord God, whose servant I am, instructed me, opened mine ear, or made me attentive to what he commissioned me to say. And so the words are explained in the next verse, "The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." And what did this willingness of Christ imply? Was it merely that he was ready to be a messenger of peace from God to fallen man? Even this had been very kind, very gracious,—an act of marvellous condescension. But whence was there such a message to bring? How came it that Christ could be the bearer of glad tidings to the guilty? Only through his consenting to stand in their room, and to be charged with their guilt. But for this, there could have been no glad tidings to preach unto the meek,—no word in season to speak unto the weary. He could have had no promise of rest to hold out to those who labour and are heavy laden, unless he had himself become a weary man and full of woe,—“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” When, therefore, he declared his readiness to hear the instructions and to execute the commission which the Lord God had given him, he did thereby declare, also, his willingness to be and to endure all that was needful to render it possible that he would ever “bind up the broken-hearted,” or “proclaim liberty to the captive,” and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. And what must have been the depth of his compassion and the strength of his love to sinners, when, foreseeing all that was implied in the commission which the Father gave him, he nevertheless willingly undertook it! He shrunk not from what he foresaw he was to pass through: he was not rebellious, neither turned he away back. His language was, “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo! I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest.”

All this, I think, is plainly implied in the willingness with which Messiah here declares that he received the commission which the Lord God had given him. And this interpretation is confirmed and farther illustrated by what is stated in the next verse, where he speaks of the sufferings that awaited him as if

he had already endured them, thereby intimating what a lively anticipation he had of their reality and certainty: "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." It has been remarked of these words, that they contain an enumeration of what were regarded, especially in Eastern countries, as the grossest and most offensive indignities or insults that could be offered to a human being. Thus, for example, to spit even in the presence of one is in the East considered an insult. How much more to spit in one's face? The verse, then, may be considered as foretelling of the Messiah generally, that he would be subjected to the most shameful and abusive treatment. But it was not a mere general prediction. It was fulfilled to the very letter, inasmuch as the history of our Lord's trial and condemnation records the very indignities that are here enumerated. And then how emphatically true was it, that he gave his back to the smiters, or those who scourged him, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and that he hid not his face from shame and spitting,—that is, he endured it all with meekness and patience,—not only offering no resistance, but making no effort to save himself from any one insult which was offered to him. "When he was reviled," says an apostle, "he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously." And what the apostle thus says of Christ as a matter of history, namely, that he committed himself to Him who judgeth righteously, Christ here foretold of himself by the mouth of his prophet. "I hid not my face," says he, "from shame and spitting: for the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint,"—that is, I have met my enemies without fear or shrinking,—“and I know that I shall not be ashamed.” He did, indeed, suffer shame, such as, in the estimation of the world, might have covered him with confusion. But he knew that he was to bring his mighty undertaking to a successful issue, and that he never could experience the shame of failure or disappointment; therefore, as an apostle has expressed it, for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame. And when he said, "The Lord God will help me," more was implied than merely that, during the days of his flesh, when he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong

crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save him from death, he should be heard in that he feared. It implied that God would openly acknowledge him, and, to the confusion of his enemies, vindicate him from all their wicked reproaches, and demonstrate, in their bitter experience, that He whom they despised and rejected was exalted to glory and honour, and invested with sovereign authority and power. And this he accordingly declares in the following verse: "He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together,"—that is, at the tribunal of the great Judge: "who is mine adversary? let him come near to me,"—that is, to establish his charges against me, if he can. "Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up." All these expressions, which are borrowed from legal proceedings before a judge, are employed to set forth the Saviour's triumph, in the testimony which God was to bear to his finished work, by raising him from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand, "angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him." And Christ's triumph was the triumph of his Church; for as it was for her offences that he was delivered unto the death, so it was for her justification that he rose again, and for completing her salvation that he has been made head over all things. And, accordingly, the apostle, in his own name, and in that of all believers, adopts the very language of the verses before us in setting forth the full and complete vindication of Christ's body, the Church, from all the accusations of the wicked one, as well as from all the reproaches of the ungodly: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

It appears, then, as I have already remarked, that in these few verses,—namely, the 4th, and the five following,—Christ has set forth the gracious purpose of his mission, the difficulties he had to encounter in executing his commission, the sufferings he had to endure in accomplishing the work which was given him to do, and his unalterable purpose of finishing that work, whatever reproach, or ignominy, or suffering it might cost him. And having thus declared what he was to undertake and do, and what a glorious triumph awaited him for doing it, he proceeds, in the

last two verses of the chapter, to address two different classes of men,—the two classes, in fact, into which all mankind are divided,—believers and unbelievers. To the first he says, “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant,”—that is, Messiah or Christ himself,—“that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” This, as I have said, is addressed to believers generally, but especially to believers in a state of darkness and spiritual depression. But this does not limit the application of the Saviour’s gracious admonition; for I am persuaded that no believer will be disposed to question my statement when I say, that a state of depression and spiritual heaviness is at times the state of all God’s people. To all believers, then, who may be in this state,—who may be walking in darkness, and having no light,—seeking rest, but not finding it, Christ says, “Trust in the name of the Lord,” and stay yourselves upon your God. They may be ready, perhaps, to say in reply, O if I could trust in the name of the Lord, and could stay myself upon my God, all would be right. But it is just because I cannot do so that I am downcast and sorrowful,—it is just because I fear that “the Lord hath forsaken me, and that my Lord hath forgotten me,” that I feel desolate and forlorn.

But to all such I would say, If you are conscious that you desire above all things to be in a state of favour and friendship with God,—if you are convinced that his favour is life, and that his loving-kindness is better than life,—and if you would prefer the light of God’s countenance to the brightest sunshine of worldly prosperity,—then do not doubt that he has himself taught you, by his own Spirit, to form this estimate of the comparative value of temporal and eternal things, and do not dishonour him by doubting whether you are at liberty humbly, nay, boldly, to cast yourselves on his grace and mercy, and stay yourselves upon him as your God. And, above all, remember by whom the admonition in the passage before us is given, and in what connection it is introduced. It is not a cold advice, which is more easily given than taken. It is the gracious admonition of the Saviour calling upon you to imitate his own example; for it is after telling you how he trusted in the Lord his God, and relied on the faithfulness of his heavenly Father in the deepest darkness which ever overwhelmed a human soul, that he calls upon

you in like manner to trust in the name of the Lord ; at the same time assuring you that he himself, who is the Lord's servant, and whose voice you wish to obey, is your surety and advocate with the Father, having undergone all that is stated in the preceding verses, for the very purpose of procuring for you the privilege of staying yourselves upon God as your God. Such is Messiah's address to all who really believe in his name, and especially at those seasons when they may be in spiritual darkness.

And in the next verse he proceeds to address those who do not know what spiritual darkness and depression means,—even those who have never really believed it as a real thing that they need a Saviour, and that unless they have a personal interest in a Saviour who is all-sufficient, they must remain for ever in what the Scriptures emphatically call “outer darkness.” Such persons may at times have their misgivings as to the future, and some suspicion that when death comes, and after death the judgment, they may, peradventure, be found unprepared to meet it. But their convictions have never been such as to shut them up to an undivided reliance on Christ, and an unreserved surrender of themselves to him. They have never looked to the Saviour as those do who feel it to be a truth, a great reality, that he, and he alone, stands between them and eternal ruin. The darkness which at times broods upon their soul is not the deep overwhelming darkness which a true sense of guilt brings with it, and which nothing but the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ can ever dispel. Their darkness is more easily dissipated. They find comfort in the thought that they are as virtuous as their brethren of mankind around them generally are, and that the mercy of God will make up for what may be unavoidably deficient in their character. With some such indistinct notion as this, their conscience is quieted,—the heaviness of heart, under which they might for a time be somewhat depressed, is removed,—their darkness is dispelled,—and they walk, as they think, in the light of the living. But it is a light of their own creating,—a fitful and faithless light, which can conduct them only to ruin ; for the solemn sentence is here recorded against all such, “Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks : walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand ; ye shall lie down in sorrow.”

XXIII.

THE SALVATION OF THE CHURCH, THE GLORY OF GOD.

ISAIAH LI. 1-23.

THE communication contained in this chapter is addressed to the true Church, the people of God, and is of a highly encouraging and consoling nature. It proceeds upon the assumption, that one of the circumstances which served greatly to discourage God's faithful people was the smallness of their number, and the little prospect that there was of their number being increased. Even from the beginning, there was reason to fear that the true Church formed but a little flock, not only as compared with the world at large, but even as distinguished from those who constituted the visible Church,—the nation of Israel at large,—who professed to acknowledge and worship the true God, but did not worship him in spirit and in truth. There were, indeed, some prosperous periods in the history of the Church, when there seemed to be good ground to believe that no small portion of the people of Israel were truly God's people, the spiritual worshippers of Jehovah. We may reckon, I think, as one of these seasons, the period that extended from the latter years of the life of Moses to the death of Joshua; and another, that which embraced the close of the reign of David, and as the beginning of that of Solomon. But these, I fear, were exceptions to the general state and character of Israel as the visible Church, and that mere nominal professors of the true religion did but too frequently form an overwhelming majority of the kingdom.

And if it had been so at former periods, it was still more obviously so in the time of Isaiah. Israel, or the ten tribes, had already been carried into captivity, because of their open rejection of the true God as their God, and of their obstinate and incorrigible adherence to the worship of false gods; and Judah, instead of taking warning by the judgment which had overtaken her sister Israel, was, in her blindness and infatuation, hurrying on to the same degeneracy, and, consequently, to the same disaster.

No wonder, then, that the faithful remnant of God's true people should become more and more depressed by witnessing the growing ungodliness of their country, and that they should be ready to despair of ever seeing any great increase in the number of those who followed after righteousness, and sought the Lord with their whole heart. And that they were discouraged and greatly cast down on this account is plainly intimated in the first verses of this chapter; for he who knoweth the hearts of all men, and discerneth their thoughts afar off,—even Jehovah himself,—here addresses his people, as if in reply to a complaint on their part, that they were very few in number, and very weak in influence, and very hopeless of ever being more numerous or more powerful. "Hearken to me," says he, "ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." As if he had said, You complain that those who seek the Lord, and who follow after righteousness, are few in number; and you are ready to despair of their being multiplied. But think from what a small beginning the Church arose, at a time when the whole human race had again forgotten and forsaken me, and when the true religion seemed to be on the very point of being utterly extinguished. At that period I called Abraham alone; or, I called Abraham, and he was the only one, or alone. He was the rock or the quarry from which I was to hew the stones that were to form my Church, or spiritual temple; and I blessed him, and increased him,—I made him the father of countless multitudes; and though the great majority of these may have been related to him only as his descendants according

to the flesh, yet during the many generations that have elapsed since the time that he was called, there have also been vast numbers who, like yourselves, were related to him by a higher and holier connection,—even as the spiritual children of a spiritual father. And having done all this, am I not able in like manner to increase and multiply you? Yes; and I will do so: “For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.”

Such, I think, is the import of the first three verses. They contain a promise not only of the restoration of Judah after being carried into captivity, but of a great and glorious enlargement of the Church. In so far as the ancient covenant people, the descendants of Abraham, were concerned, this promise was in part fulfilled when they returned again from Babylon, rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple, and dwelt, as beforetime, in the cities of Judah; and a still more glorious fulfilment yet awaits them, when they shall be redeemed from their vain conversation, received by tradition from their fathers, and shall be brought to believe that Jesus, whom their fathers crucified, is both Lord and Christ. But the promise is not to be limited to them; it belongs to the Church at large, not exclusively to the Jews as a part thereof. The true Church has been from the beginning, and will be to the end, one, though at different times under different dispensations, and is so regarded by her great Head. Every true believer, in every age, is a member of Christ’s mystical body, and has an interest, in common with all other believers, in Christ’s promises to his people. The prediction in the passage before us, then, is addressed to the true Church of all times subsequent to the day on which it was uttered; and the promise of great enlargement which it contains is constantly in the course of fulfilment, though that fulfilment may advance more or less rapidly at different periods. Meanwhile the Church, God’s true people, are making a right use of that promise, when, in the exercise of faith in it, they draw consolation from it at those seasons of darkness in which the truth seems to make but little progress in the world; and when they take encouragement from it to adopt and prosecute with vigour such plans as may

be within their reach for advancing the Redeemer's kingdom, nothing doubting that that kingdom will one day embrace the world, when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth "as the waters cover the sea."

That the promise contained in these verses is to be understood in this large sense, and by no means to be confined to God's dealings with the Jews alone, is farther evident from what is said in the 4th and following verses. There it is expressly declared that the people, the Gentile nations, were to share in the promised blessings,—that their conversion was to form part of the glorious enlargement here foretold: "Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law," or revelation,—that is, the Gospel, which is denominated a law by the apostle, even "the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations, for the obedience of faith,"—"a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest," or, I will establish my judgment, "for a light of the people," or, "the nations." "My righteousness is near,"—that is, the manifestation of my righteousness, in the deliverance of my people, and in the punishment of their enemies, is near. The expression, "near" does not always mean immediate, or what would seem to us near. It rather signifies certain or determined, as applicable to a purpose or decree which cannot be defeated or reversed. "My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people," or nations: "the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust." The word "isles," or "islands," frequently occurs in this book, obviously to denote the other nations of the world as distinguished from Israel, God's covenant people; and so it evidently does here. But when it is said of the isles, "They shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust," we are not to suppose that these Gentile nations are represented as expecting or longing for a manifestation of the true God. Like a similar expression elsewhere used by the prophet, it means that these nations, involved as they were in all the darkness of ignorance and idolatry, could be delivered only by a gracious interposition of God himself,—that nothing but his law could bring them light, and that no other arm but his could save them. At the same time, these verses do contain a promise that he would so interpose on their behalf; and this

promise, being addressed to the Church, would seem to intimate, what is very plainly taught elsewhere in Scripture, that she was to be employed instrumentally in carrying his gracious purpose into effect. But however this may be, a great and glorious enlargement of the Church is here promised; and to remove any doubt which the Church might entertain of the fulfilment of that promise, so contrary to what human foresight could anticipate, an appeal is made, as on many other occasions, to the almighty power and unchangeable faithfulness of God: "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner,"—even those things that appear the most permanent and stable may be utterly changed, and actually decay;—"but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished."

From this representation of the power and faithfulness of God, as contrasted with the feebleness and frailty of man, occasion is taken to remind the Church how little she had to fear from the reproaches of her enemies, and how impotent they were to prevent the fulfilment of the divine purposes regarding her: "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation." The ground of consolation presented to the Church in these verses seems to be, that her salvation is that whereby God is in an especial manner to be glorified; and that, therefore, it was impossible that his gracious purposes concerning her could be defeated, or could fail of being fulfilled. All God's works, indeed, bear testimony to his being and perfections: for "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork;" the earth also is full of his goodness; and his wonders are seen in the great deep. In like manner, his moral government of the world, his providential dealings with men in reference to this present life, bear witness to his rectitude as the sovereign Ruler, the righteous Lawgiver and Judge. But far more glorious still is the revelation which he has made of

himself as the Redeemer of his people; and so it is very emphatically declared in these verses. The heavens themselves shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment,—these stupendous monuments of the power, and wisdom, and goodness of God, will, as it were, cease to be; and men, as the subjects of his moral government here, will in like manner decay and die; and the state of things whereby he did, from time to time, manifest his rectitude and truth, shall come to an end. But his righteousness as the Redeemer of his people, even that righteousness whereby he has been revealed as the just God and the Saviour, will be everlasting,—it will stand for ever forth in the sight of his holy intelligent creatures, as the most glorious display of his character; for the salvation of the Church is represented in Scripture as the subject of admiration, wonder, and praise, not only with the redeemed from among men, but with angels in heaven. John heard a new song sung in heaven by the redeemed, “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests.” But John heard, also, at the same time, and as a continuation of the same song, “the voice of many angels round about the throne, . . . and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousand of thousands; saying, . . . Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

It is very plain that in these first eight verses of the chapter, it is Jehovah himself who speaks, and that he is addressing the Church,—not only the faithful remnant of Isaiah’s time, but the Church of all subsequent times. In the next verse, however, there seems to be a change in the person who speaks,—a very common thing in the writings of Isaiah, as every attentive reader must have observed. The words of the 9th and two following verses are addressed to the arm of Jehovah,—that is, to Jehovah himself; and though some are of opinion that it is still God who

speaks, I think such an interpretation is forced and unnatural. But there is a difference of opinion even among those commentators who are so far agreed as to think that another party is here introduced as speaking. I have no difficulty or hesitation in adopting the opinion, that it is the Church who is here represented as addressing God. As if encouraged by the gracious promises that had just been given her, and yet feeling still some fear or misgiving as to the fulfilment of these promises in the face of so much opposition, and with the consciousness of so much weakness on her part, she betakes herself to prayer, earnestly beseeching God that he would do what he had just promised, and pledged his power and faithfulness to do. It is no objection to this view of the subject to say, that the promise being so expressly and unconditionally given, the Church did not need to plead so earnestly as she is here represented as doing, as if the accomplishment of what had been promised depended on the urgency of her supplications. On the contrary, it was just because the promise was very explicit and unqualified, that she was required and encouraged to pray. It is a principle in the economy of grace, that even where the promise of God to his people is the most absolute and unconditional, he will be inquired of, or prayed to, by them to do it for them. Daniel recognised and acted upon this principle, in regard to God's promise to restore Judah, after the captivity of seventy years at Babylon. Never was a promise more absolute or unqualified than that promise was, which was spoken and recorded by the prophet Jeremiah. Yet, when the appointed period of the captivity was drawing to a close, we find Daniel saying, "I, Daniel, understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." And then he poured out that remarkable prayer, recorded in the 9th chapter of his book, in which he pleaded the fulfilment of God's promise to restore his captive people, with as much earnestness and urgency as if that fulfilment had depended on his supplication, or as if there might be still so much sin in Judah as to prevent it.

And so the Church, I think, is here represented as acting.

As if encouraged and emboldened by God's gracious and large promise,—taking him, if I may so speak, at his word,—she sets herself by prayer and supplication to entreat that he would do as he had said,—or rather, as if he might forget or delay to fulfil his promise. And to encourage herself in her boldness and urgency, she calls to mind the doings of the Lord in former days; she remembers “the years of the right hand of the Most High,” even his “wonders of old,” and she puts him, as it were, in remembrance of these doings, as if appealing to his regard for his own honour, whether he would not, for his name's sake and his glory's sake, interpose again for her deliverance as he had done in times past. “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab,”—that is, Egypt, as seems to be proved by other passages,—“art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?”—another expression by which Egypt is set forth. “Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.” This last verse, it will be recollected, is the literal repetition of a promise previously given, and recorded in the 35th chapter of this book. And if our interpretation of this passage be correct, then the introduction of that promise here is peculiarly expressive. It is as if the Church, in her great earnestness and urgency, had said, If thou wilt remember the great things which thou didst for thy people in the days of old, and wilt again make bare thy holy arm for their deliverance, as thou didst formerly, then the promise which thou hast already given them will be fulfilled, and “the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

And in this view of the passage, what marvellous encouragement does it afford to the people of God to be earnest, urgent, and persevering in prayer, when they are conscious that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, they desire that God may be glorified

in granting them what they pray for ! The words here put into the mouth of the Church, as we have now explained them, are designed to show believers of all times with what liberty, and enlargement of heart, and holy boldness, they may come to a throne of grace, to ask for the fulfilment of the great and precious promises which he has given and recorded concerning the extension and establishment of Messiah's kingdom. And in holding out this encouragement so to pray, the passage does also plainly intimate, that the fulfilment of these promises is very intimately connected with the supplications of the Church for that fulfilment. This truth, as we have already seen, was strikingly exemplified in the case of Daniel. And in a subsequent chapter, the 62d of this same book, it is declared to be the duty, as well as the privilege of all believers, to be as earnest and urgent as the Church is here represented to be ; while, at the same time, the intimate connection between their prayers and the enlargement of the Church, the extension of Christ's kingdom, is very plainly stated : " I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

I have already had occasion to remark, that while the Church was greatly encouraged by the promises contained in the first eight verses of this chapter, yet she might still have some feeling of fear and misgiving as to the fulfilment of these promises, when she contemplated the number and power of her enemies; and that it was in this state of mind that she betook herself to prayer, as set forth in the 9th and two following verses. In the 12th verse, Jehovah himself is again represented as speaking in answer to the prayer of the Church; and that answer confirms the view which I former'y took of the frame of mind in which she had betaken herself to a throne of grace : " I, even I, am he that comforteth you : who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?" Here it is plainly declared of the Church,

that she had been and was afraid of her enemies; and in so far as she was so, she was chargeable with forgetting God, and losing sight of that omnipotence which was adequate to defend her from all adversaries, however powerful. It has been remarked, and I think truly, that there is something peculiarly emphatic in the expression, "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?"—as if he had said, Consider who thou art,—who it is that hath redeemed, and hath undertaken to protect thee,—consider that thou art the Church of God, Jehovah's ransomed people, in whom he will be glorified; and when thou rememberest this, art thou not humbled and ashamed to think that thou hast been "afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" I need hardly remark, that it was not the object of this remonstrance to awaken any thing like self-confidence in the Church; for of her own weakness, as well as unworthiness, she never could be too deeply convinced. And, indeed, we find in a subsequent part of this chapter a very vivid picture of the state of utter impotence and helplessness to which she was reduced. But the remonstrance was designed to revive and to strengthen her confidence in God, that she might be able to say, as we find the saints often saying, in perfect consistency with the deepest humility and self-distrust, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" To encourage the Church thus to feel and speak in reference to God, she is reminded of the omnipotence of Jehovah, as not only the Creator of heaven and earth, but as the Sovereign Ruler of the world, breaking the rod of the oppressor, and setting at liberty the captives whom he held in chains, and, moreover, as in an especial manner her God, who had done, and would still do great things on her behalf: "I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The Lord of hosts is his name." Jehovah then proceeds to say in the next verse, the 16th, "And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people."

It is a question with commentators, To whom are these words

addressed? They evidently describe Messiah's office and work, as that is set forth in other parts of Scripture. If, therefore, they be addressed to the Church, it must be to her as related to Christ,—to her, and to her Head, as one person,—a form of address which some think occurs frequently in the writings of Isaiah, and which is accounted for on the ground that the Church is Christ's witness or messenger to the world, and, therefore, the instrument for carrying on his mediatorial work. In the case before us, it is, I think, Messiah himself who is addressed; and he is represented as entrusted with the revelation of the divine will for the salvation of men,—“I have put my words in thy mouth.” He is farther represented as hitherto concealed, or but partially known even to the Church,—“I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand.” And it is farther declared that when he was manifested, it would be to introduce a new and more glorious dispensation, such as might be compared to a new creation,—“that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people.” On the strength, then, of this glorious interposition on her behalf, the Church is called to awake from the state of depression and despondency into which she had been thrown by the calamities which had overtaken her, and by her being apparently deserted of the Lord her God. She is represented as astonished and stupified, like one that was drunken, because of the cup of trembling that had been put into her hand,—as pitied by none, and far beyond the reach of human help. “These two things are come unto thee; who shall be sorry for thee? desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword: by whom shall I comfort thee?”—that is, Who but myself can comfort thee? “Thy sons have fainted” and are exhausted, and therefore unable to help or relieve thee; “they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net: they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God.” Such was the miserable and helpless condition to which Jerusalem and Judah, the visible Church, were to be reduced because of their backsliding. And under such overwhelming calamities, expressly declared to be the visitation of God's righteous displeasure, even the faithful remnant, the true Church, might be filled with amazement, and be ready to surrender themselves to a feeling of utter hopelessness. But, in the midst of all their

tribulation, provision was made for keeping alive their faith and hope by the very promises recorded in this chapter, as well as in other passages of Scripture; and these promises would be the more precious in that they were recorded in immediate connection with a prediction of all the calamities that were to befall them. And, accordingly, the prophetic description of the misery and oppression to which they were to be reduced is followed up by the assurance of a deliverance,—a deliverance which was to be palpably and undeniably the doing of the Lord, and was to be more glorious by the very depth of humiliation from which they were to be raised: “Therefore, hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine: Thus saith thy Lord the Lord, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: but I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.”

It may appear, perhaps, at first sight, as if the promises in these concluding verses, as well as in the preceding part of this chapter, referred mainly to deliverance from temporal calamities, and that, therefore, they are not so applicable to the Church now as they were under the old dispensation, when the nation of Israel or Judah constituted the visible Church, containing the true Church within it, and when national disasters did consequently involve the true Church in great outward tribulation. And it is no doubt true, on the one hand, that backsliding and a low state of religion did under that dispensation bring with it temporal calamities; and it is equally true, on the other hand, that the revival of the true religion was accompanied to the Church with a return of worldly prosperity. It followed, therefore, that the spiritual enlargement and the temporal deliverance of the Church were included in the same promise; and both were frequently foretold in language that was specially applicable to worldly relief. But it were a very unwarranted and unworthy view of the faithful remnant of God's heritage, the true believers of that time, to suppose that such promises as those contained in the chapter before us were precious to them

mainly because they involved restoration to the peaceful enjoyment of a worldly inheritance with all its comforts. It is plainly intimated concerning them, at the very commencement of this chapter, that it was a subject of deep and serious concern with them,—a source of grief and sorrow,—that there were so few who sought the Lord and followed after righteousness, and that there was so little prospect of their number being increased. We cannot suppose, indeed, that they were insensible to the temporal calamities which were coming upon the nation, and in which they could not avoid participating, or that they were indifferent to the temporal blessings with which the return of the people to God never failed to be accompanied, and in which also they would have their share. But it is plain, from the manner in which the true people of God are here and elsewhere addressed, that the chief subject of their sorrow and regret, when calamities came upon Judah, was, that God's name had been profaned, and that there were so few who revered and honoured him ; and, in like manner, that when deliverance was again wrought out for them, the main source of their joy was, that God's great name was glorified, and that the number of those who sought him and followed after righteousness was greatly increased.

It is assumed in Scripture,—it is, I may say, expected,—that this should be the mind of God's people in all times. It is upon this supposition that such promises as those in the chapter before us have been recorded ; for it is only in so far as God's people have this mind or feeling that they can take any interest in or derive any comfort from promises like these. The interests of true religion and the temporal interests of believers are not now, indeed, so intimately bound up together as they were under the old dispensation ; and the people of God, therefore, may rest satisfied with such promises as do more immediately concern their own spiritual comfort, without feeling any very lively concern in those which refer to the general interests of Christ's kingdom. But this is a narrow, contracted, selfish spirit, very unlike the large-heartedness which the faith of the Gospel ought to produce ; and they who cherish it greatly err if they think that they do thereby best consult their own spiritual comfort. That comfort would assuredly be greatly enlarged did they cherish a

feeling of deeper interest in the prosperity of Zion. And their temporal comforts, moreover, would in like manner be enhanced; for though these may not be immediately connected with the progress of the truth, yet if that progress were more the object of their earnest desire and longing expectation, they would be prepared more largely to enjoy prosperity, and more patiently to endure adversity. And how would the sources of their consolation be multiplied in perusing the Scriptures, did they habitually feel that all their interests are bound up in the interests of Christ's kingdom; for in such a frame of mind, every promise bearing upon the establishment of that kingdom would be full of interest to them personally, and would awaken in them the anticipation of the joy and gladness with which the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come unto Zion.

XXIV.

THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH.

ISAIAH LII. 1-15.

IN this chapter we have a renewal of the gracious promises addressed to the Church in the preceding chapter,—or rather, additional promises, expressed in language peculiarly strong and emphatic. The very first clause of the first verse strikingly exemplifies this remark, “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion.” In the preceding chapter, the Church is represented, in her state of depression and apparent desertion, as taking encouragement from the promises which had been given her to call upon God for help; and the form which her prayer assumed was that which we find the Church at large, as well as individual believers, adopting in times of trouble. It was an appeal to God’s former interpositions and mighty works on behalf of Israel, putting, as it were, the question, whether he would not, for his name’s sake and his glory’s sake, again interpose for her deliverance and enlargement: “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old.” When Jehovah, therefore, was pleased to address the Church in the very language in which she had implored his interposition, “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion,” he did, in the most emphatic manner, assure her that her prayer was heard,—that his arm was ready to be again made bare on her behalf,—and that it only remained for her to shake off her fear and faint-heartedness, to rouse her from her faithless

lethargy, and so be delivered from her debasement and servitude. In herself, indeed, the Church was weak and helpless, and her enemies, moreover, were numerous and powerful. But she was called upon to put on her strength, because Jehovah himself would impart strength to her. The very call which was addressed to her implied this; for otherwise it was a call with which she could not have complied, and one, therefore, which would not have been addressed to her by her faithful and covenant-keeping God. But while the very language in which she was addressed did most expressly assure her that strength would be communicated according to her need, it did as plainly and emphatically intimate that it was in the exercise of faith, or in a believing effort, on her part, that this strength would be forthcoming for her deliverance,—a doctrine which is everywhere very explicitly taught in Scripture,—the doctrine, namely, that God's promises to his people will be available to them only through faith on their part. And the promise thus given in such a peculiar form, and in language so instructive as well as explicit, was still more fully and largely stated in the next clause of the verse, "Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city." Here, again, there is an obvious allusion to what we find recorded towards the conclusion of the preceding chapter. There the Church is represented in the day of her calamity, as suffering all the indignity and degradation which her enemies could inflict. Not only had these enemies entered into, and polluted and laid waste her holy places, but they had said to her, "Bow down, that we may go over,"—they had reduced her to a state of the most grievous oppression and servitude,—they had, as it were, trodden her under foot,—she had laid her body "as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over." But she is here assured, not only that she should be raised from the dust, delivered from bondage, and separated from the contagion of idolatry, to which she was exposed in a state of captivity among the heathen, but should be exalted to a royal estate, and arrayed again in that honour and glory which had been laid in the dust.

This assurance, like the promise in the first clause of the verse, is expressed in the form of a command, calling upon her to do all this for herself: "Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come

into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust ; arise, and sit down,"—that is, sit upon thy throne,—“O Jerusalem : loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.” Such a command, as I have already remarked, implied a promise that God would do it for the Church ; or, rather, it was a very emphatic way of expressing that promise. But as if to remove all doubt of this, the promise is directly and explicitly given in the next verse : “ For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought ; and ye shall be redeemed without money ;” that is, as nothing was gained, no honour accrued to me, by the captivity to which ye brought yourselves by your sin and folly, so nothing shall be lost by your restoration ; I will redeem you without money. And in farther confirmation of this promise, reference is made to former interpositions on behalf of the Church, as pledges that God would so interpose again, especially in a case that did still more urgently require such an interposition : “ For thus saith the Lord God, My people went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn there ; and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause ;” that is to say, I delivered my people from Egypt, and afterwards I saved them out of the hand of the Assyrians. “ Now therefore, what have I here, saith the Lord, that my people is taken away for nought ?” that is, taken away by the Babylonians. “ They that rule over them make them to howl, saith the Lord ; and my name continually every day is blasphemed.” As if he had said, Did I deliver my people on former occasions from the enemies that oppressed and vexed them ; and shall I not deliver them again from those who have taken them captive, and by whom my name is continually blasphemed ? “ Therefore my people shall know my name : therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak ; behold, it is I.” It is plain that this promise did, in the first instance, refer to the deliverance which was to be wrought for Judah from the captivity into which she was to be carried by the king of Babylon, that being the first great interposition on behalf of the Church which was to take place subsequently to the time of Isaiah. But it is equally plain, from the following context, that the promise is not to be limited to that one event ; for that event, memorable as it was, did not exhaust it. The glorious things here foretold could only be fulfilled in Gospel

times, and even yet are only in progress of fulfilment. As the deliverance from Egypt was to the Church of Isaiah's day a pledge of her deliverance from Babylon, so the latter was a pledge to the Church of subsequent times that the great Deliverer would in due time appear, and fulfil all that had been foretold of him by other prophets, as well as by Isaiah in this very chapter. The promise, then, is one which the Church may continue to plead, and from which she may draw consolation and encouragement, till the day come when the name of Christ shall be known from the rising to the setting sun, when "the Lord shall be king over all the earth," when "there shall be one Lord, and his name one."

That the prediction of the prosperity and extension of the Church contained in these verses is to be understood as referring not to one event, as the return of Judah from Babylon, but to all the great things which were to be done on behalf of God's people in subsequent times, is confirmed by what is stated in the 7th and following verses: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" We might suppose, perhaps, that in these words Isaiah intended to describe what he saw in prophetic vision respecting the deliverance of captive Judah,—even a messenger appearing on the mountains, bringing the glad tidings that God had visited his people in their affliction, and had turned again their captivity, thereby vindicating his supremacy, and making the heathen to know that the Lord God omnipotent, the God of Zion, reigneth. And this view of the subject accords well with what follows, where the watchmen of Zion are represented as lifting up their voice, and with one accord proclaiming the good news, while the very ruins of Jerusalem are called upon to rejoice. Nor can we doubt that this special deliverance formed part of the revelation which was made to Isaiah. But the apostle has taught us to put a larger interpretation on the passage; for he expressly applies the words before us to the preachers of the Gospel,—to those who were commissioned to publish abroad the glad tidings of the great salvation which Christ had wrought out. The prophetic vision of Isaiah, therefore, though embracing the restoration of the Baby-

lonish captivity, extended far beyond that period, even to Gospel times. He beheld the messenger or herald of the new dispensation, and he heard him announce the glad tidings, even saying to Zion, "Thy God reigneth,"—the very announcement which Christ himself, and his forerunner, John the Baptist, made, when at the commencement of their ministry they preached, saying, "The kingdom of God," or the reign of God, "is at hand."

To the true Church, this was indeed glad tidings; for it was the announcement of a deliverance of which all former deliverances were but types or prophetic intimations. And, accordingly, the watchmen of Zion,—that is, of the Church, set forth under the figure of the city of Zion, or Jerusalem,—are represented as receiving these good tidings with great joy and gladness of heart, uniting with one heart and one soul in proclaiming the glorious advent of the great Deliverer to all who were waiting for the consolation of Israel: "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." At that time, indeed, the watchmen were few, and few were those also to whom the advent of Messiah was good tidings. Though Jerusalem had been restored, and the temple had been rebuilt, after the Babylonish captivity, and both stood in greater splendour, in some respects, than before, yet Zion, or Jerusalem, as figuratively signifying the Church, had never been at any period more desolate or more ruinous than at the time of Messiah's advent. Even those who constituted the true Church, and were really looking and waiting for the coming of Messiah, were involved in so much error, and blinded by so many prejudices, that they could hardly be brought to recognise and acknowledge Christ when he did appear; so that the figure here employed by the prophet, of a city ruinous and lying waste, was as applicable at the time of Christ's advent to the Church, in a spiritual sense, as it was descriptive of the material Jerusalem when desolated by the king of Babylon. But though the watchmen of the spiritual Zion were thus few, and the inhabitants thereof far from numerous, it was here foretold that these watchmen would be increased in number, and quickened to greater zeal and watchfulness in observing and announcing the great Deliverer; and in the call addressed to the waste places of Jerusalem to rejoice,

there was a gracious prediction or promise, that though, to all appearance, the true religion was well nigh extinguished, and that few or none seemed to be waiting for the redemption of Israel, yet there would be a blessed revival, and when the kingdom of heaven appeared, there would be found multitudes eagerly pressing into it. "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem."

There was an intimation of the approaching fulfilment of this promise in the ministry of the Baptist, as well as in that of Christ himself; and it was largely fulfilled in the ministry of the apostles, when they were set watchmen on the walls of Zion, seeing eye to eye, being infallibly guided by the same Spirit in proclaiming the glad tidings of a finished salvation,—and when, by the conversion of many thousands, through their preaching, to the faith of the Gospel, the waste places of Jerusalem did indeed begin to break forth into joy, and sing together, saying that God had indeed visited and redeemed his people, and had raised up an horn of salvation for them in the house of his servant David. Still, this was but the commencement of the reign of God,—the beginning of the state of things here announced by the emphatic declaration addressed to Zion, "Thy God reigneth." Zion, or Jerusalem, as here applied, meant a great deal more than merely the faithful remnant of Judah and Jerusalem,—the believing Jews who constituted the first Christian Church. The word Zion is obviously to be understood of the Church universal,—of all, out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation, and people, who should be converted to the faith of the Gospel. And, accordingly, in the 10th verse, it is declared that the mighty power of God, which is figuratively expressed by his making bare his holy arm, was to be manifested in the sight of all nations, and that his salvation was to be seen by all the ends of the earth, inasmuch as among all nations, and even from all the ends of the earth, multitudes were to be called out of a state of darkness and bondage into the light and liberty of the sons of God: "The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." This predic-

tion, in its full extent, is still only in progress towards accomplishment; but it was largely fulfilled, and a pledge was given for its complete fulfilment, in the commission given to the apostles, and in the amazing extent to which they executed the commission which appointed them to be witnesses unto Christ, "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea; and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

This great deliverance, whereby countless multitudes, not of Jews only, but of Gentiles also, were to be called out and separated from the world, is represented in the 11th and following verse as a grand procession or exodus, similar to the departure of Judah from Babylon on their return to their own land, or the march of Israel out of Egypt. This prediction, as in the preceding part of the chapter, is delivered in the form of a command, calling upon the people of God to depart, or separate themselves from the world, to which they had hitherto been in bondage, and from the impurities of the world, whereby they had been polluted and defiled. "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord,"—or, "ye armour-bearers of Jehovah." When the prophet gave utterance to these words, there might be presented to his prophetic eye the future departure of Judah from Babylon, bearing along with them the holy vessels of the house of God, which had been carried away by Nebuchadnezzar, and restored again by Cyrus. But the next verse would lead us to conclude that it was especially to the exodus from Egypt, and the march of Israel through the wilderness, that the prophet referred. That march was, indeed, a procession, the most solemn and magnificent. The mighty host of Israel were the bearers of the vessels of the Lord, inasmuch as that host contained in it a divinely-appointed priesthood, carrying with them the tabernacle and its furniture, or sacred utensils, whereby acceptable offerings were presented to God; and the same host were also the armour-bearers of Jehovah, inasmuch as they were appointed to fight the Lord's battles, and to vindicate his supremacy as the only living and true God. And yet, glorious as that procession was, we are here taught to regard it only as a type,—a faint and imperfect type,—of the glory of the Church under the new dispensation. "For," says the prophet, in the 12th

verse, "For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward." It will be remembered of the departure of Israel out of Egypt that they went in haste; for "the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste." But it was not to be so in the great deliverance here foretold: "Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight." And this difference between the two deliverances, showing the superiority of the last, gives greater force to the resemblances between them, as intimating that in these two the glory of the latter was to exceed that of the former.

In the march through the wilderness, the cloudy pillar accompanied the host of Israel, going sometimes before, and sometimes behind them, as their difficulties and dangers required. And so it would be, but in a far higher sense, in the great deliverance under the new dispensation: "For the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward." The pillar of cloud which accompanied Israel of old was but the symbol of God's presence with them in an outward manner, guiding them through perplexities, and protecting them from dangers of an external kind. It was not in itself a gracious spiritual presence; for even with that cloud of glory full in their view, the host of Israel did frequently exhibit a most daring and stout-hearted rebellion against God, openly murmuring against the Lord, and against his servant Moses. But in regard to those who are to form the glorious company here spoken of, the presence of God was to be with them in a far higher, even a spiritual sense. Though their deliverance from captivity,—their exodus from the house of bondage,—was not to be accompanied with any pomp or magnificence to strike the senses of men, yet God was to be with them of a truth, separating them from a sinful world, as really as Israel were separated from Egypt when they were enclosed in the wilderness, with God only as their protector and their guide. Though they might not be preserved, as Israel were, from the assaults of enemies from without, yet they would be strengthened and defended from the most dangerous of all enemies, even from every thing that would draw them away from their allegiance to Him who had regarded them in their state of servitude and misery, and had come down graciously to bring them deliverance

and enlargement. Though outwardly, and in reference to worldly influence and power, they might be weak, yet they would be kings and priests unto God,—priests, bearing the vessels of the Lord, and offering the acceptable sacrifices of gratitude, praise, and holy obedience,—and kings, even the armour-bearers of Jehovah, to fight the battles of the Lord, not with carnal weapons indeed, like Israel of old, but with weapons “mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds.” Such was to be the glorious deliverance here foretold; and in regard, therefore, to those who were to be the subjects of that deliverance, it might be said of them, in a still higher sense than it was said by Moses of ancient Israel, “The Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.”

From the sublime description of the great deliverance which was one day to be wrought for the Church, a transition is very naturally made to the glorious person by whom that deliverance was to be achieved,—that is, to Messiah himself: “Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.” This statement may be considered as a general description of Messiah, of his work, and of the result of that work. He is called Jehovah’s servant, as we find him elsewhere denominated in this book, and in accordance with what he said of himself, when he declared that he had come to do the will of his Father who had sent him. It is said of him, that he should deal prudently or wisely,—that is, he would execute the work which had been given him to do to the full satisfaction of him who appointed him to that work; and, as a consequence of all this, he should be exalted and extolled, and be very high,—an expression which comprehends the substance of many a New Testament declaration concerning the exaltation of Christ, and the ground of that exaltation. But this general account of Messiah, contained in the 13th verse, is followed up by a more minute and detailed description of him, which extends to the close of the next chapter. In the concluding verses of this chapter, Christ is set forth, as in the 13th verse, but more fully, in all the depth of his humiliation and suffering, and in all the glory of his exaltation; and it is declared that the one shall bear due

proportion to the other,—that as in his humiliation he was the object of astonishment or aversion, so in his state of exaltation he shall be the object of admiration and reverence: “As many were astonished at thee,”—that is, regarded thee with surprise and aversion,—“As many were astonished at thee, so shall he sprinkle many nations.” The second clause of the 14th verse is to be considered as parenthetical, introduced to explain how it was that men regarded him with astonishment or aversion. It was the effect of his suffering: “His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men,—” that is, his lowly and suffering condition made him to be regarded with contempt and aversion. But notwithstanding this, or rather, in consequence of this, he shall be admired and revered. As in his humiliation many were astonished at him, so shall he sprinkle many,—not merely individuals, but nations. He will sprinkle them with the blood of that atoning sacrifice which he offered, when, as a suffering Saviour, his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men. And while, in virtue of this his expiatory sacrifice, he was to be the author of eternal salvation to many, “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,” even “kings,” it is declared, “shall shut their mouths at him,”—that is, be silent before him in token of reverence, or, in other words, shall do him homage. And the reason of their doing so is assigned in the last clause of the verse,—and a reason, moreover, which shows that it is Gentile kings that are here referred to, even such as were previously utter strangers to a divine revelation: “The kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see: and that which they had not heard shall they consider,” or understand. These last verses, therefore, plainly show that the whole of the preceding prediction is to be understood in the large sense in which we have interpreted it,—as not to be restricted to the deliverance of Judah from the captivity of Babylon, but as stretching forward to New Testament times,—as foretelling the spread of Gospel light and liberty among all the nations of the earth. And so the apostle has told us; for in the 15th chapter of his epistle to the Romans, he applies the last verse of this chapter to the preaching of the Gospel to those who had never before

heard it. "So have I strived," says he, "to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: but, as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see; and they that have not heard shall understand."

The passage which we have thus briefly considered ought to be full of interest to every believer, considered simply as a prediction of the future enlargement of the Church and her final establishment, in the conversion of all nations to the faith of the Gospel. Much of what is here foretold has already been accomplished; and we should beware of undervaluing what has already been done towards carrying into effect the glorious deliverance here predicted of immortal souls from their state of ignorance, guilt, and servitude. In what a different condition did the apostles leave the world from that in which they found it at the commencement of their labours, as ambassadors for Christ, as the armour-bearers of Jehovah! and amidst all the struggles which the Church has had to maintain, and notwithstanding the seasons of declension which have at different periods come upon her since the days of the apostles, what countless multitudes have there been who made their escape from all the degradation and defilement of their house of bondage, and who found, amidst all their conflicts, that the Lord went before them, and that the God of Israel was their rereward! Believers ought to remember and rejoice in all these; and on the principle here laid down respecting the deliverances wrought for the people of God in Old Testament times, believers should regard the past triumphs of the Gospel as so many pledges and tokens of future and still more glorious victories, till the kingdom of the Redeemer, the dominion that he is to wrest from the powers of darkness, shall extend from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. The firm conviction that such victories will infallibly be achieved is essential to the maintenance of a lively and active zeal in the cause of Christ. There can be no such zeal where there is no realising apprehension of the certainty of its ultimate triumph. Such predictions, then, as we find recorded here, should be full of interest to believers, as fitted to awaken a vivid anticipation of the time when all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

But the passage before us ought to be precious to believers,

also, as being applicable to themselves individually. And it is so, not merely on the ground that the promises or predictions concerning the Church generally must refer also to the individuals who compose the Church. The very language which is here addressed to Zion, to the people of God, in their collective capacity, may be considered as addressed to every individual believer personally. And, in fact, it is in substance so applied in other parts of Scripture. It is by such a call as that in the 1st verse of this chapter, when carried home with power to the understanding and the heart by the Spirit of God, that the sinner is roused from his deadly slumber, and, by a believing effort to obey that call, is quickened to spiritual life. So the apostle applies this, or a passage of similar import in the 60th chapter of this book, when, in his epistle to the Ephesians, he quotes the substance of the passage, as addressed to individuals: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." A strange call, it may be said, to be addressed to one who is not only asleep, but dead! So might the Jewish captives in Babylon have said; for they were no more able to loose themselves from the bands of their neck than if they had been dead. So might the paralytic man have said, when Jesus addressed him, saying, "Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house;" or the lame man at the gate of the temple, when Peter said unto him, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Yet such is the Gospel call. It is addressed to those who are dead,—dead in trespasses and sins; and the call is, in substance, the words of the prophet, as quoted by the apostle, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." And for a season it may be unheard or unheeded, even by those who are destined ultimately to obey it; but they are in God's own time and way awakened to a sense of their guilt and danger,—they look about for help,—they see that there is only one who can help them,—they hear him still calling, as he had often done before, though they disregarded him,—they begin to listen to that call, as they never before listened,—they discover that it is addressed to them individually and personally,—they feel as the paralytic or lame man felt, when he was called to rise up and walk,—and, like him, they object not to the call as a strange or unreasonable one, but by a believing effort they are enabled to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to them in

the Gospel. Then they know, in their experience, that he who so long called, and whom they had so long disregarded, was God himself; for then is fulfilled in them the prediction recorded in the 6th verse, "Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak; behold, it is I."

Not less striking to believers will be the fulfilment, in their experience, of another promise here recorded: "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." This, too, is applicable to believers individually; for the apostle so applies it in the 6th chapter of his second epistle to the Corinthians: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." This is a call to believers to separate themselves from the pollutions of the world,—to break off all those alliances which would ensnare or entangle them, to the jeopardy of their spiritual interests,—to renounce every thing that would mar or hinder their growing holiness in heart and life. The world, however, will throw many obstacles in the way of their complying with this call; and they may be ready to fear at times that they shall not be able to surmount the difficulties which beset them in their conflict with worldly influences. But this call, like the former, involves in it a promise,—even the precious promise which was more fully and expressly given afterwards by Christ himself to his servant: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." When, therefore, in simple reliance on this promise, they set themselves in earnest to conflict with every thing that would tempt or terrify them into backsliding, they will find that He who is with them is greater far than all that can be against them,—they will be delivered from that fear of man which was in danger of ensnaring them,—they will cease to attempt any compromise between worldly advantage and their allegiance to Christ,—and, while they are conscious of steadily advancing in the divine life, growing in holiness and in comfort, they experience the fulfilment of the promise, "Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward."

XXV.

COMPLAINT OF THE PROPHET.

ISAIAH LIII, 1, 2.

It has often been remarked of this chapter, that it describes the humiliation and sufferings of Christ with so much accuracy and minuteness as to resemble more the historical narrative of an evangelist who had been an eye-witness of Christ's manifestation in the flesh, than a prediction of him given forth seven hundred years before he appeared. And everybody must perceive that the remark is well founded ; for not only are the predictions here given of what Messiah was to do and endure in perfect accordance with what the evangelists have told us that they actually saw him do and suffer, but the prophet speaks as if he had been one of the evangelists,—as if he had been an eye-witness of what he was commissioned to foretell. Throughout the whole of this chapter, he speaks of Christ's humiliation as a thing that was past, and describes his sufferings, and death, and burial, just as he might have been expected to do, if he had accompanied Christ in his journeyings through the land of Judea, had stood by the cross on Mount Calvary, and had followed the Lord's body to the sepulchre in which Joseph and Nicodemus laid him. In fact, so clear was the revelation that was made to the prophet,—so vivid his perception of what was presented to him in vision,—that he lived, as it were, in the times of which he prophesied, and was an eye-witness of the scenes which he described. And this remark is not applicable only to the chap-

ter before us. It applies generally to the later prophecies of Isaiah,—that is, to the 40th and the succeeding chapters of this book ; for through the whole of these chapters, we find the prophet speaking of events which concerned the Church, not as future and distant events, but as what was present to him,—as events in which he was personally concerned. And I do not doubt that those who live to witness the fulfilment of the glorious things which he foretold concerning Zion, will see in that fulfilment much to illustrate the remark,—much to show that all these glorious things were as vividly present to the eye of the prophet as if he had been an eye-witness of the transactions which he describes. And this is especially manifest in regard to the prophecy contained in this chapter, inasmuch as that prophecy refers to a certain fixed period, and to the personal transactions and sufferings of a certain individual,—even the long-promised and long-expected Messiah. How far the prophet understood the true character of Messiah, as God manifest in the flesh, exhibiting at once all the lowliness of the humblest and most afflicted of men, and all the power and majesty of the God-head, we cannot tell. It is said of the prophets generally, that they searched and inquired diligently into the meaning of what they were themselves commanded to predict concerning Christ and his work ; and it may be that the very brightness of Isaiah's prophetic vision,—the very clearness with which he saw Messiah, in all the depth of his humiliation, and in all the glory of his triumph,—served to render Christ's person and work still more profoundly mysterious to him than it was to the other prophets, and awakened a more earnest desire fully to understand the import of what he foresaw and predicted. But however this may be, Isaiah is, without doubt, pre-eminently, what he has often been called, the evangelical prophet ; and, independently of many other passages in his writings, where the Gospel is very clearly proclaimed, the single prophecy before us furnishes sufficient grounds for the title ; for it is here especially that the Spirit, by the mouth of the prophet, “ testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

This chapter, as we have already seen, is intimately connected with the preceding,—of which, indeed, it may be considered as the continuation. In that chapter the prophet had set forth, in

very sublime language, the glorious revival and prosperity of the Church under the new dispensation; and towards the close of the chapter, he had begun to speak of Messiah himself, by whose appearing that dispensation was to be introduced. This is the main subject of the last three verses of the chapter, and the concluding verse represents Christ, in the exercise of his divine power, gathering in his redeemed people from all nations, and making even the kings of the earth to submit, and to do him homage. He shall "sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him; for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider," or understand. But while the vision of the prophet did thus stretch forward into Gospel times, and to the conquests which the truth was to make by the conversion of sinners, when Christ should take to him his great power and reign,—and while the prophet, as we may well believe, contemplated with peculiar satisfaction the glorious state of things thus unfolded to his view,—he saw also, as it were in the foreground, a scene of a very different kind,—even Messiah in his humiliation, not only unacknowledged, but actually rejected with bitter scorn, yea, reviled, persecuted, and put to death, by those on whose behalf he had come to work out a deliverance, of which all former deliverances were but shadowy representations. To this state of humiliation the prophet had referred in the preceding chapter; for there he had represented Messiah as an object of wonder and aversion, his visage being "marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men."

From this view, however, of Christ's lowly and suffering condition, the eye of the prophet had been quickly directed to his exaltation, and to the exercise of his divine power in subduing the people under him, and applying to them all the benefits of his atoning sacrifice. And to the prophet, as I have already said, this must have been a glorious prospect. But he was not permitted to dwell upon it. His attention was recalled to the other and most mysterious scene,—the humiliation of Messiah; and that scene was as vividly presented to him in prophetic vision as if he had been from first to last an eye-witness of it. Indeed, we must consider the prophet as actually seeing what he describes, and must read this prophecy as if it had been written

by one who lived during our Lord's manifestation in the flesh, and who was familiar with all the transactions of that memorable season. It is only by thus conceiving of the prophet's position that we can enter fully into the import of this remarkable prophecy. And when we do thus conceive of him, how emphatic is the first clause of the first verse! "Who hath believed our report?" The prophet speaks in his own name, and in that of the other prophets, who, like him, had testified of Christ as the great deliverer, who had been promised from the beginning, and to whose coming it was the great object of the prophets to direct the faith, and the hope, and the longing expectation of the Church. But when the prophet beheld Messiah actually manifested, he saw also that scarcely any recognised or acknowledged him. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

To the prophet, seeing all this, it must have appeared as if all that had been foretold by himself and others concerning the promised deliverer had been in vain, and as if the great deliverance was to fail, because they who were to be the subjects of it did, in their blindness and folly, refuse to be delivered. The prophet, of course, did not mean to assert that there were absolutely none who recognised and acknowledged Messiah when he appeared, any more than the evangelist John did when he said of Christ, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not;" for though this seemed to imply that none knew or acknowledged him, yet John says, in the very next sentence, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." And so is the prophet's language to be understood. But when he contemplated the general feeling that prevailed among the Jews concerning Christ, and the treatment which he received at their hand, the number of those who believed in him would appear as nothing compared with those who rejected him; and there was still ample room for the prophet's most expressive lamentation, "Who hath believed our report?"—as if he had said, Is there any one who believes it? Nor was the lamentation applicable to the Jews only, whether of our Lord's time or of subsequent times; for notwithstanding all the triumphs which the Gospel has already

won, and notwithstanding the countless multitudes who have been persuaded to receive Christ, and have had power given them to become the sons of God, yet when we think of the still greater multitudes, even in the countries where the light of the Gospel shines, who either openly deny Christ, or mock him with a mere outward profession of faith in him, what reason would prophets and apostles still have to say, "Who hath believed our report?"

But the report, or the witness of the prophets, was not the only testimony for Christ which the Jews overlooked or set at nought. In the second clause of the first verse, the prophet puts another question which is very emphatic and full of meaning: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Like the preceding, this question does very expressively affirm that few or none saw the arm of the Lord revealed. But it farther affirms that they whom the prophet saw rejecting Christ, did not only misunderstand or despise the testimony of prophecy concerning him, but did also resist still closer and more palpable evidence,—even that of the arm or mighty power of God, manifested before their eyes in the person and public ministry of Christ. The prophet, then, asserts that in the appearance of Christ, the manifestation of the Word in the flesh, the arm or mighty power of God was revealed, and ought to have been seen and recognised on the part of those for whom it had thus been made bare. And, farther, the prophet's language implies that in the advent of Christ, the arm of the Lord was revealed in a very peculiar manner,—in a manner more striking than on any former occasion. His energetic form of speaking shows, I think, that this was his meaning. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" are questions which plainly intimate that the prophet lamented it as the most deplorable example of blindness and infatuation that men did not see in Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah of whom Moses and the prophets did write, or in the person and ministry of Jesus the most glorious revelation of the arm or mighty power of Jehovah. From the beginning, the Jews had been no strangers to very clear and striking manifestations of divine power. No small portion of their history, indeed, is occupied with the narrative of divine interpositions on their behalf,—a series of stupendous miracles wrought for their deliverance or their protection. They

were familiar, therefore, in so far as they were acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures, with examples of the immediate operation of the arm of God, as experienced by their fathers,—delivering them from bondage, miraculously providing for their subsistence, defending them against enemies alike inveterate and powerful, putting them in possession of a goodly heritage, preserving them there in spite of all the efforts of their enemies to vanquish or dispossess them, and not unfrequently rescuing them in great mercy, when, by their folly and disobedience, they had forfeited, and for a season lost all right to the possession which had been bestowed upon them, and all claim to any interposition on their behalf. Neither was it a new thing in the history of the Jews to disregard or set at nought the revelation of God's mighty power on their behalf: for it is recorded of them, that with the most awful intimations of Jehovah's presence before their eyes,—even the lightnings, and thick clouds, and tempest which enveloped Sinai,—they made a golden calf, and worshipped it; and in the midst of miracles of almost every day's occurrence, they were often found in open rebellion against the Lord, and against his servant Moses. The prophet Isaiah, too, had witnessed not a little of the stubborn and stout-hearted disobedience of his countrymen; for after foretelling and actually beholding the great deliverance which was wrought for Judah and Jerusalem in the time of Hezekiah, by the destruction of the mighty host of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, he lived to witness the almost universal apostasy of the people under the wicked reign of Manasseh.

But the passage before us evidently sets forth the manifestation of Christ in the flesh as unspeakably surpassing in glory all former revelations of the arm of Jehovah, and, consequently, represents the rejection of Christ as in like manner the most lamentable instance of the blindness and infatuation which had too frequently characterised the Jews from the beginning. And so it evidently was. The incarnation of the eternal Word, God manifest in the flesh, was a revelation of Jehovah altogether different in kind from any former revelation that he had condescended to make of himself to the children of men. Former communications of the divine will were conveyed through the instrumentality of men; and former intimations of the divine

presence were made by means of created things, as thunder, lightning, and earthquake; and, no doubt, such intimations were very solemn, and were calculated to fill the minds of those who witnessed them with profound reverence and holy awe. But what were all these compared with the appearing of Christ,—of God in very deed dwelling with men on the earth? And how surpassing in glory were the miracles which Christ wrought as a revelation of the arm of Jehovah! Though less calculated than some former miracles had been to startle or to terrify men, they were fitted to convey clearer as well as more exalted conceptions of the moral attributes of the Godhead. He possessed and he exercised an absolute control over all created things. At his bidding the tempest was stilled; for he commanded the winds and the water, and they obeyed him. By his word he healed “all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people;” and by the same word the dead were raised to life. He could at pleasure awe the boldest of his enemies into submission; and in selecting his friends, he had only to say, “Follow me,” and they were bound to him by an attachment which death itself could not dissolve. Over the spiritual world, also, he manifested sovereign authority and power; for, times without number, in the presence of assembled multitudes, he commanded unclean spirits, and they obeyed him,—nay, under the dread and dismay with which his presence filled them, they were compelled to acknowledge his divinity, and to give utterance to their terrible anticipation of the discomfiture which awaited them when he was to spoil “principalities and powers, making a show of them openly,” and of the still heavier punishment to which he was to doom them when the time to torment them was come.

It was thus that the arm of the Lord was manifested in the person of Messiah; and the manifestation was the more glorious, and the better fitted to arrest the attention, and to convince the understanding, and to take captive the affections of men, because of the lowly condition in which he appeared, and because of the forbearance, compassion, and kindness, which characterised every thing that he said and did. And yet to how few was the arm of the Lord revealed, in the sense in which the prophet uses that word?—that is, by how few was it recognised and acknowledged? And to how few comparatively is it yet revealed? No doubt,

there are very many who believe, or, rather, do not deny that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah of whom Moses, and Isaiah, and all the prophets wrote,—that he is the Son of God,—that he performed the miracles which are ascribed to him in the Gospel histories,—that he suffered, and died, and rose again,—and that he liveth for evermore, being exalted to glory and honour at the right hand of God. The evidence of all this has so accumulated, and, in a state of society like ours, men have been so much accustomed to hear it acknowledged, that, by a very large proportion of those who know any thing about the matter, it may never have been called in question, but, on the contrary, professedly believed. But still, there may be too much reason to say with the prophet, “To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” It has been revealed to those only to whom Christ has become the power of God unto salvation. We may admit or believe all the manifestations of Christ’s power in his miracles, in his judgments on his enemies, and in the extension of his kingdom by the conversion of sinners to the faith of the Gospel; but this will avail us nothing, if that power has not been experimentally felt in our own souls. We are individually and personally under a load of guilt which Christ only can remove,—we are personally in a state of bondage from which he only can set us free. Our deliverance, therefore, must be a personal matter with each of us. We may believe that, as it is written, he will “sprinkle many nations;” but what will that avail us, if he has not sprinkled us, so as, by the application of his own blood, to pacify our conscience? We may believe that he will subdue many nations, and that the kings of the earth shall do him homage; but the question is, Has he subdued us, and made us willing in a day of his power? Have we truly felt that our condition is really a helpless, and, but for Christ, a hopeless one? Have we seen and believed, with reference to ourselves individually, that he is able and willing to help us? And have we been enabled to close with his gracious offer of interposing on our behalf, and to commit our interests into his hand, believing that he undertakes for us? It is only in so far as we have thus experienced the efficacy of Christ’s blood in speaking peace to our conscience, and the power of his Spirit quickening us to spiritual life, that the arm of the Lord has been revealed to us.

I have had occasion to observe, that the manifestation of the

arm or mighty power of God in the person of Messiah was the more glorious, and the better fitted to arrest the attention of men, because of the humble and lowly condition in which he appeared. And yet, so entirely were the Jews possessed with carnal desires and expectations regarding Messiah and his kingdom, that the very lowliness of his condition rendered them still more blind and insensible to all the manifestations of his divine power, compassion, and mercy. Surely there was enough, in the glorious combination of divine excellences in the person and character of one so meek and so lowly as Jesus, to have filled them with amazement at least. The multitude at times showed some symptoms of such a feeling; for we are told of those in his own country, that is, Nazareth, or the neighbourhood, that when they heard his teaching and saw his miracles, "they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?" But with regard to the leading men among the Jews, the marvellous, the still mysterious character of Jesus did not seem to have awakened even wonder or astonishment. So deeply and so hopelessly debased were they, that the lowliness of his condition filled them with the bitterest malignity and hatred, not unmingled, perhaps, with a feeling of dread. The idea of such an one being the Messiah was at once revolting to their pride, and ruinous to their worldly hopes. And so powerful was their influence for evil, that they not only held the multitude in bondage to all their erroneous opinions and monstrous perversions of Scripture truth, but those also who really were waiting for the consolation of Israel, who felt their spiritual necessities, and longed for a spiritual deliverer, had imbibed so many prejudices from the false doctrine of their religious teachers, that even to them the lowly condition in which Messiah appeared proved for a season to be a stumbling-block. And all this is very explicitly stated in the second verse: "For he shall grow up,"—or as it may be rendered, "for he has grown up," which agrees better with the form of expression in the rest of the passage, where the prophet is supposed to be describing what was past, or what he saw passing before his eyes:—For he has grown up "before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."

In these words the prophet speaks in the name of those who were at first perplexed by the lowly condition in which Christ appeared, and for a season could not be made to believe that he was the great deliverer promised unto the fathers, but were afterwards brought to see and understand the purpose of his so appearing, as stated in the 4th and following verses,—namely, that he might make an atonement for his people, as their surety and substitute. They here acknowledge, therefore, their former unbelief, and plainly intimate that it was because of their carnal prejudices, whereby they were led to entertain the hope of a temporal as well as a spiritual deliverer in the person of Messiah, and could not, therefore, conceive how Jesus of Nazareth could be that deliverer; for he grew up before him,—that is, before Jehovah,—“as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground.” Not only did he appear, in their estimation, very humble and lowly, even as a feeble plant from ground that could not afford sufficient nourishment, but he was so. The figure here employed to set forth the lowliness of his birth is repeatedly employed in Scripture, and by the prophet Isaiah himself, in reference to Christ as coming from the royal house of David. In the 11th chapter of this same book, it is said, “There shall come forth a rod,” or shoot, “out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.” And in the prophecies of Zechariah, it is said, “Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord.” In these prophecies, as well as in the passage we are considering, the house of David is represented as a tree cut down, and withered, apparently never to spring again. And so it seemed to be when that house came to be represented in Mary of Nazareth. But it could not die; for a shoot, or branch, was one day to spring from it, infinitely more glorious and beautiful than the tree itself had ever been. It was, therefore, watched over and cared for by Jehovah himself; and when to all appearance it was utterly decayed, he caused to spring from it, and to grow up before him, a stem, or shoot,—a plant of renown,—a righteous Branch, under whom Judah should be saved, and Israel should dwell safely, and whom his people should call, “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

Still, the birth of Christ was very lowly. It could not be.

otherwise ; for the house of David, from which alone he could come, was reduced to a very low estate. Even those, therefore, who were waiting and longing for his appearing were perplexed and troubled. Whether they knew or not that he was descended from the royal house of David, every thing connected with his birth and condition forbade them to hope that he was ever to sit on the throne of David, or to vindicate and defend the national rights and privileges of Judah. But so grievously had they been misled by their spiritual guides, and so fully possessed were they with the hope of a temporal deliverer in the person of Messiah, that, in their judgment, none could be Messiah who was either unable or unwilling to be such a deliverer. The very obscurity out of which he arose was itself, in their estimation, an almost insurmountable objection to his Messiahship ; for influential or powerful friends he had none. He was "as a root out of a dry ground." But his whole future life was in accordance with the obscurity and lowliness of his birth. He grew up "as a tender plant." To their eye, therefore, he had "no form nor comeliness;" that is, according to the views which they had been taught to entertain, and the hopes which they had been encouraged to cherish, respecting the person and work of the Messiah, Jesus possessed nothing that marked him out as that Messiah. They saw him ; but there was no beauty, no royal pomp or magnificence, nothing of what the world thinks comely majesty, that they should desire him. There was, indeed, much in Jesus that was fitted to attract and win them, and by which, moreover, they were attracted and won. By his gracious words and his beneficent miracles, he addressed himself to their spiritual wants and their spiritual longings ; and they felt, in their inmost heart and soul, what even the hardened officers of justice felt in their conscience, "never man spake like this man ;" and could they have at once thrown off their worldly prejudices, and relinquished their worldly hopes of a temporal deliverer, they would have seen in Jesus of Nazareth all that Old Testament prophets had foretold of the majesty of Messiah's person, and the glory of Messiah's kingdom. But so long as they were under the influence of these prejudices and hopes, the very attractiveness of Christ's character, and teaching, and miracles, was a source of painful perplexity to them. They could not doubt,—their heart and affections would not permit

them to doubt, that there was in Jesus himself, or manifested through him, the power of giving eternal life.

But was he then the Messiah? They felt that spiritually he was to them all that the Messiah could be; for when he said, "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee," they felt that they were put in possession of a peace which the world could not take from them,—even "the peace of God that passeth all understanding." Yet even this peace might be disturbed by the constant return of the question, Where is the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, which we have been taught to believe was to be Messiah's first and great work? And, judging of all other believers in Judah at that time by what has been recorded of the disciples, we may conclude that from this state of perplexity and doubt they were not delivered till they had witnessed the crucifixion and death of Jesus, and were made to understand that he was wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities. And how gracious and kind was this method of Christ's dealing with the faithful remnant of his people, whom he found in Judah when he appeared there! It was for their sake, and for the sake of his people in all subsequent times, that he condescended to be born in a low condition, and in a low condition to live and die. In so far as his own humiliation was concerned, it mattered little whether he appeared as a mighty earthly potentate, or as a homeless and helpless infant. That he who was the eternal Word, the Creator of all things, without whom nothing was made that is made, should place himself in circumstances where it could be said of him that he was born, was an act of humiliation and self-abasement which could not be essentially affected, so as to be increased or diminished by the particular circumstances in which he appeared among men. But to his people it was of unspeakable importance that he was born, and lived in a low condition. It was thereby that he did most effectually extinguish all those worldly hopes and expectations which tended to cloud their views of his spiritual character, and thereby he prepared them for all the reproach and persecution which they might have to encounter for his name's sake; for what can reconcile believers to such suffering, if it be not the consideration that Christ also suffered for them, the just for the unjust, that he might bring them unto God.

XXVI.

CHRIST'S HUMILIATION.

ISAIAH LIII, 3, 4.

THIS chapter, as I had formerly occasion to observe, contains the clearest and most complete prediction to be found in Scripture of the humiliation, sufferings, and death of Christ, as well as of the consequences of that death. It is expressed, not in the language of prophecy, foretelling something future, but in that of history, recording what is past, and what the writer had actually witnessed. The prophet speaks as if he had been present when Christ appeared,—as if he had heard the Saviour's teaching, seen the mighty works which he did, and witnessed the treatment which he experienced at the hand of the Jews. And, accordingly, in the first verse, he expresses his surprise and sorrow that the predictions which he himself and the other prophets had been commissioned to deliver concerning Messiah, were almost universally misunderstood or disbelieved by the Jews. These predictions did so fully and faithfully delineate the character, condition, and work of Christ, that but for the most wilful blindness, or the most deplorable prejudices, men could not have failed to recognise him when he did appear, as the person of whom the prophets testified or reported. And yet so few were they who did recognise or acknowledge him, that to the eye of the prophet there seemed to be none; and he exclaims, as with a feeling of painful disappointment, "Who hath believed our report?" But the predictions of the prophets were not the

only testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus which the Jews overlooked or disbelieved. The arm of Jehovah, or the mighty power of God, was manifested in him as it had never before been. Often before, indeed, that power had been gloriously displayed ; for often had the Lord made bare his holy arm in the sight of the heathen, working deliverance for Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. But unspeakably surpassing all these in glory was the manifestation of the power of God in the person of Messiah, inasmuch as he appeared not only to announce, but to achieve a ransom, of which all former deliverances were but prophetic intimations. And of this, the great purpose of his coming, he gave abundant evidence ; for not only did he plainly declare that he had come to deliver men from the bondage of sin and Satan, but by innumerable miracles, which demonstrated alike his divine compassion and divine power, he gave the fullest assurance and the most unquestionable proofs that he was to destroy the works of the devil, and that in sending him God had “ visited and redeemed his people,” and had “ raised up an horn of salvation” for them “ in the house of his servant David.”

But to all this evidence, also, of the Messiahship of Jesus, plain and palpable as it was, the Jews were utterly blind,—so universally blind that the prophet asks, as with wonder and sorrow, “ To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ?” But farther, the very condition in which Jesus appeared, though it ought to have been one of the most striking proofs of his being the great Deliverer foretold from the beginning, was, in their estimation, the most decisive proof that he was not the Messiah. That condition was a very lowly one. He claimed not,—nay, he disavowed, all temporal grandeur and authority. Yet he manifested a divine compassion, and he exercised a divine power, and plainly intimated that it was spiritual blessings which he had come to bestow. And such a marvellous combination of lowliness and majesty was itself fitted to awaken the most profound admiration, and, moreover, to convince men, that he who exhibited such a wonderful character must have had some object to accomplish, unspeakably more glorious than the display of the pomp and splendour of a mere temporal sovereign. But besides all this, the lowliness of his condition had been the subject of repeated and most express predictions. He had been foretold

as a rod, or shoot, out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch growing out of his roots. It had been predicted that as the Branch he was to grow up out of his place, and to build the temple of the Lord. And in this very passage, which must have been familiar to the Jews in our Lord's time, he is spoken of as growing up like "a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." And yet, when all this was fulfilled even to the letter,—when he grew up "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground,"—a shoot from the stem of Jesse, when to all appearance that stem was decayed and ready to die,—not only did the Jews resist the evidence of this remarkable fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, but they converted that very fulfilment into an argument against his Messiahship,—a proof that he could not be the Deliverer promised to the fathers. According to their carnal views of what Messiah's kingdom was to be, they saw nothing in Jesus that corresponded with Messiah's character. In their eye, he had "no form nor comeliness." Nor was it those only who were sunk in ignorance, formality, and earthliness, that were thus blind to the glory of Christ's character, and to the fulfilment in his person of the plainest predictions of Old Testament prophecy. Even the few who formed the faithful remnant in Judah,—those who "looked for redemption in Jerusalem," and were really "waiting for the consolation of Israel,"—even they had imbibed so much of the false doctrine of their spiritual teachers, and were so much under the influence of worldly hopes and expectations, that for a time they were in darkness and perplexity regarding the character of Jesus. The lowliness of his birth was to them, also, for a season, a stumbling-block; for it is in their name that the prophet speaks, when he says in the second verse, "And when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."

From this description of the obscurity and lowliness of Christ's birth, the prophet proceeds to set forth his sufferings,—beginning with those that originated in the carnal views which the Jews entertained of Messiah's character and kingdom: "He is despised and rejected of men;" that is, of the Jews generally, or as a nation. And this was what might naturally be expected of those who were determined to hold by their own false hopes and expectations of a temporal deliverer, in opposition to the plainest

declarations of the prophets, and in spite of the numerous and incontrovertible proofs which Jesus himself gave both of a divine power and of divine beneficence; for with such men it was a settled point, a truth not to be controverted or even discussed, that one so humble and lowly as Jesus of Nazareth could not possibly be the promised Messiah. But we are not to understand the expression, "He is despised and rejected of men," as simply meaning that the carnal and ungodly Jews, with the Scribes and Pharisees at their head, rejected our Lord's claim to be the Messiah, with all the evidence which he furnished in support of that claim, and then treated him and his pretensions with silent contemptuous indifference. They could not do that. His miracles, so numerous, so beneficent, and wrought in the presence of such vast multitudes of themselves, must have awakened at times some strange misgivings in their minds, and must have driven them to some desperate devices, for the purpose of bringing these miracles into discredit. And we know from the Gospel history that it was so. They attempted to deny the reality of the miracles. But they could not; and they were compelled to acknowledge that they could not. "The chief priests and the Pharisees said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation."

From day to day, therefore, the miracles of Jesus must have haunted them as the manifestations of a mysterious power, from which they might have much to fear, but nothing to hope for; nor would their misgiving be greatly quieted by the vain and blasphemous attempt to convince others, or to persuade themselves, that he cast out devils by Beelzebub the prince of devils. And this fear alone would be sufficient to awaken in their minds toward Jesus a feeling of bitter hostility. But that hostility must have been inflamed to the highest pitch of malignity and revenge by another cause,—I mean the unspotted holiness of his life, and the sublime and spiritual character of his exposition of divine truth; for what must these have been to men who had perverted or explained away all that was spiritual in the law of God, and whose conscience must have told them that they could not controvert the truths which he taught, nor deny the charges which he brought against themselves? When it is said, there-

fore, "He is despised and rejected of men," the expression does not merely imply that his claims were denied, and that he was treated with silent contempt, or even derision. He was the object of an active, combined, and persevering malignity. All the influence which wealth, and rank, and high religious pretensions could command, was exercised to render him the object of scorn and suspicion. He was openly calumniated and reviled; and spies were employed to watch him, and sometimes to attempt to entangle him in his talk. Every art was used to inflame the multitude against him, as one who was the common enemy of mankind, and whose destruction it was every man's duty to seek by every means in his power; and with what success these arts were employed is proved but too clearly by the terrible transactions of the last days of the Saviour's life, when the multitude ferociously clamoured for his death,—and a death, too, the most cruel and ignominious. "Away with him, away with him. Crucify him, crucify him,"—"his blood be on us, and on our children." We may form some conception, though a very inadequate one, of what our Lord must have endured throughout the whole period of his personal ministry, in being every day subjected to an unrelenting persecution like this,—a persecution which every new manifestation of his divine power and beneficence served only to render fiercer and more implacable. Though that persecution, therefore, had been the only source of his suffering during the period of his humiliation, it were sufficient to show how truly it is said of him, in the next clause of the verse, that he was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

This language is very strong and impressive. Eminent critics have observed that the phrase, "man of sorrows," means the man who has sorrows, as it were, for his possession or portion; and, in like manner, that the expression, "acquainted with grief," implies one who has formed, as it were, the bond of friendship with grief, so that they were inseparably united. But strong and emphatic as this language is, it is no more than strong enough to express what the Saviour endured from day to day, and from year to year, while he was pursued with a malignity which continued to gather strength from the manifestation of that divine excellence on his part which ought to have disarmed it,—a malignity, moreover, which he foresaw was one day to

animate the great mass of the people, even the very multitude that had largely experienced his beneficence, and had at times been moved by something like feelings of admiration and gratitude. And while he felt acutely all those bodily privations to which a persecution so bitter and unceasing must have exposed him, who can conceive of what his holy human soul must have suffered from the treatment which he thus experienced at the hand of those to whom he offered, not only deliverance from all manner of sickness and all manner of disease, but also the richest spiritual blessings,—even redemption from the guilt and condemnation, and deliverance from the power and pollution of sin? We must never forget that the human nature of the Lord Jesus was alive to all those sufferings, both of body and of soul, to which any perfectly holy man would have been alive if placed in his circumstances, and who, at the same time, foresaw what was to be the termination of the hatred and malignity with which he was incessantly pursued. And what, then, must he have endured from the calumny, and reproach, and impious misrepresentations, and ingratitude of those who were witnesses of his miracles of mercy and beneficence, and were themselves partakers of that beneficence! And how profound must have been the sorrow with which his holy soul was afflicted, when he contemplated the fearful guilt which his enemies were contracting by their rejection of him, and the terrible retribution which he foresaw was one day to overtake them! And to all this he was feelingly alive; for he said of himself, by the mouth of the psalmist, “Reproach hath broken my heart;” and in regard to Jerusalem, we are told of him that “he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

So far the prophet speaks of the treatment which Jesus experienced at the hand of the impenitent and ungodly among the Jews,—that is, the mass of the people at large. But there was another aggravation of all these sufferings, to which the prophet refers in the next clause of the verse: “We hid as it were our faces from him: he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” Here the prophet speaks in the name of those who did ultimately attain to right views of Christ’s character and work, and to

true faith in him as the Saviour of sinners. These the prophet represents as confessing that they, too, had long laboured under much blindness and many carnal prejudices respecting Jesus,—that they had been but too much influenced by the impious opinions so generally entertained and so violently expressed concerning him,—and that however much their hearts at times might be drawn out towards him by his unceasing acts of kindness, and by the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, yet they had not the faith and the fortitude openly to acknowledge him. “We hid as it were our faces from him.” We acted towards him as if we had been afraid or ashamed to be seen countenancing or acknowledging one who was not only held in contempt, but was maligned, loaded with execration as the worst of malefactors, and persecuted with the deadliest hatred by those who enjoyed the largest share of public respect, and who had been wont to guide public opinion. It was thus that he was despised; and if we did not openly join in the almost universal conspiracy that was formed against him, yet neither did we openly manifest respect or esteem for him,—we were not so thoroughly convinced of his Messiahship as to be ready to peril any thing for his sake. “He was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

Such is the confession which the prophet puts into the mouth of those who were ultimately brought to believe in Jesus as the Messiah or Christ, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, but who, during his humiliation, were so blinded by prejudice as to be afraid or ashamed outwardly to manifest even the reverence and admiration which at times they did feel for him. And that there were such persons is proved by at least two examples recorded in the Gospel history,—Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea,—both members of the Jewish Council, and both, I think, disciples of Christ. Of Joseph, indeed, it is expressly said that “he was a good man and a just, . . . who also himself waited for the kingdom of God,”—and, moreover, that he was “a disciple of Jesus.” And with regard to Nicodemus, the part which he acted along with Joseph in the burial of the Lord’s body, places it beyond all doubt, I think, that he too was a true believer. Yet of Joseph we are told, that though he was a disciple of Jesus, it was secretly, for fear of the Jews,—he was afraid to

avow his convictions, in consequence, we may suppose, of the resolution which had been adopted, that if any man did confess that Jesus was the Christ "he should be put out of the synagogue." And of Nicodemus it is recorded, that when, on one occasion, he made an attempt in his place in the council to divert his brethren from the illegal violence which they were about to perpetrate against Jesus, by putting the question, "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" he was silenced by the weak and profane scoff, "Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." Had these two disciples, then, given utterance to their feelings in looking back upon their conduct towards Jesus up to the moment of his death, in what other language could we more readily conceive them expressing these feelings than in that which the prophet employs, when he says, "We hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not?" Nor can we doubt that there were many others in similar circumstances. Indeed, it is expressly said that many even among the chief rulers believed on Jesus, "but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue." And though it is added concerning them, that "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God," yet the time might come when they, too, would look back with sorrow and shame on that fear of man's reproach and that love of man's approbation which prevented them from acknowledging Him whom they at last found to be all their righteousness and all their salvation.

And how many are there still among Christ's professed followers who have reason to lament in themselves a similar want of faith and fortitude to acknowledge Christ, in circumstances where they were especially called upon to do so? Professing Christians may be, and frequently are, placed in such circumstances; for though nothing like persecution or punishment may be incurred by confessing him, yet if men will follow the Lord wholly, they must often do so in opposition to prevailing opinions and fashionable practices, and these, to many, are very formidable enemies to encounter. Shame, I fear,—the shame of being thought singular,—the fear of incurring the contempt of the world,—has proved the ruin of many a fair profession, and has

entailed much sorrow and humiliation even on those who have not actually made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. To the unbelieving world the name of Jesus is still offensive, as it was to the unbelieving Jews. A general profession of regard for something called religion will be endured. But a profession which makes the will of Christ paramount to all other authorities,—which regards the glory of Christ and the advancement of his kingdom as the greatest and most desirable of all ends,—and which avows that love to Christ is the only motive that will ever effectually constrain men to aim at that end,—such a profession as this will assuredly excite the world's hostility; and that hostility every one who makes such a profession must expect to encounter. I cannot reckon up the various occasions on which the dislike of the world may be awakened, or the various ways in which it may show itself. But all professing Christians may do well to inquire, whether they have not at times been placed in circumstances where the fear of man,—the desire of escaping reproach or securing praise,—has prevented them from saying or doing what, as their own conscience testified, an affectionate concern for the honour and glory of Christ would have prompted them to say or do? And if so, does it not become them to adopt the confession, "He was despised, and we esteemed him not?" Their sin, indeed, is evidently the same in kind with the sin of those into whose mouth the prophet put that confession. And is it not more aggravated? For what perplexities or dangers have they ever been exposed to, compared with those which were encountered in the days of the Saviour's humiliation? In his sight, too, the sin must be still as offensive as ever. It is true that the unfaithfulness of his people now cannot affect him as his holy human soul was affected by it in his state of humiliation and suffering. But should it not melt them into godly sorrow to think that they have been chargeable with that fear and faint-heartedness in acknowledging him which greatly aggravated his sorrows in the days of his flesh, when he not only complained in regard to his enemies, "Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness;" but when of his friends also he was constrained to say, "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none: and for comforters, but I found none."

In the next verse the prophet, still speaking in the name of the same persons, represents them as saying that they had at length discovered what for a season they had not seen, namely, the vicarious nature of Messiah's sufferings,—that is, sufferings endured in the room and on the behalf of others. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows;" that is, he hath borne the griefs and carried the sorrows which we were righteously doomed to bear and carry. This passage, indeed, has been quoted by the evangelist Matthew in such a way and in such a connection as might appear at first sight to imply that it meant nothing more than that Christ bore, or carried away, the bodily diseases with which men were afflicted. The quotation occurs in the 8th chapter of his Gospel history, where he says of Christ, "When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils; and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." Here the evangelist does certainly speak of our Lord's healing diseases, as a fulfilment of what the prophet foretold in the passage under consideration. But he does not say that it was the only fulfilment,—that which exhausted the meaning of the prophet's prediction. It was a fulfilment; for Christ came to destroy the works of the devil,—that is, to counteract the evils which sin had produced. One of these evils was bodily disease, in all its innumerable forms and degrees. Christ began his work, therefore, by healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people,—not as if that were the whole work which he had come to do, but as the beginning or first part of that work, and as an intimation of the great spiritual healing which was the chief object of his coming. Nobody, I think, can attentively and seriously read the Gospel history, without being convinced that the manner in which Jesus wrought his miracles, as well as the persons upon whom they were wrought, did in reality proclaim to all, without exception, that they might come and be healed, and that their being healed was another proclamation that they and all others might come and have their sins forgiven, and so find rest and peace unto their souls. When the evangelist Matthew, therefore, speaks of the prediction as being fulfilled in the miraculous cures of bodily disease which

our Lord performed, he speaks of a real fulfilment, but not such as exhausted the meaning of the prophecy. He speaks of the commencement of a work which was to be finished in the death of Christ,—that great remedy for all the spiritual diseases which sin had entailed on men.

It is to the vicarious nature of Christ's sufferings, then, that the prophet here refers, speaking in the name of those who, in the preceding verses, had confessed their blindness to the glory of Christ's character, their slowness of heart to believe what was so plainly true, and their backwardness to avow what they did believe concerning him. In the verse before us, they acknowledge that they had made a great and glorious discovery, when they were made clearly to see and understand that all the griefs which Messiah bore, and all the sorrows which he carried, were not on account of any thing in himself that required him so to suffer, but in the room and for the sake of others, even of themselves. At one time they thought that what he suffered must in some way have been due to himself; and while they thought so, the sufferings which they saw him undergo must have added greatly to the difficulty and perplexity of the question, Can this be the Messiah? There was much, indeed, in the Old Testament institutions, as well as prophecies, which, if understood, would have prepared them to expect a suffering Messiah. The ordinance of sacrifice, in its essential principle, as well as in all the prescribed rites and ceremonies which accompanied the observance of it, plainly taught the doctrine of vicarious suffering, or the death of a victim in the room of the guilty. But the Jews of our Lord's time, even those of them who were longing for a spiritual deliverer, were so bewildered and blinded by the false doctrine of their religious teachers, that they seemed unable to make the plainest application of the plainest truths of their own Scriptures, for the purpose of determining whether Jesus was the Messiah. And so they acknowledge in the verse before us; for it is evidently with astonishment at their former blindness that they confess having at last seen that Jesus endured on their account what they once thought he had suffered on his own: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted,"—that is, We thought that for some mysterious cause, for something

in himself, notwithstanding all that appeared excellent and lovely in his character, God saw it right to visit him with such unexampled griefs and sorrows. And if through false teaching they had lost the key of knowledge, that which would have unlocked the treasures of the Old Testament, showing them that a suffering Messiah was everywhere taught there,—if once they lost this, we can easily understand how they should be involved in the deepest perplexity by every thing that they witnessed in and about Jesus of Nazareth, even by all that he said, or did, or endured.

They could not but feel that in his beneficent miracles and in his gracious doctrine there was something more heavenly and divine than any thing that they had ever seen, or any thing that their spiritual guides had ever taught,—a remedy which not only healed their bodily infirmities, but had begun also to soothe the disquietude of their wounded spirit. But when they saw him solemnly condemned, without a dissentient voice, by the great council of the nation,—delivered over unresisting, and apparently weak and helpless, to the tribunal of Pilate,—execrated as the vilest of impostors and malefactors by the whole multitude that crowded around the judgment-seat,—made the object of mockery and insult, alternately by the soldiers of Herod and the officers of Pilate,—condemned by the latter to a death prescribed not by the Jewish, but by the Roman law,—deserted, in this the hour of his extremity, even by those who knew him best, and ought to have loved him most,—and at last crucified with every circumstance of ignominy and insult;—when they saw all this, what could they think, but that for some cause, though they could not conceive what, he had incurred the righteous displeasure of God? A clear apprehension of what had everywhere been taught in the Old Testament concerning a suffering Messiah might have solved their difficulties, and explained the mysteries of that dark and dismal season. But without such a knowledge of the Scriptures, with what other feeling than that of the deepest sorrow and most painful perplexity could they contemplate the closing scene of the life of Jesus? To use the words of a learned and godly commentator, “Who can wonder that such a spectacle should have staggered many?” And if so, how glorious, how consoling, must have been the discovery which they at last made,

and which enabled them to say, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows," though "we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted!" And a glorious discovery it still is! I do not mean, of course, the knowledge of the mere fact that what Christ suffered, he suffered not on his own account, but vicariously,—that is, in the room and on account of others. Everybody,—I mean every professing Christian,—knows this, and has known it from his infancy. We cannot, therefore, call this a discovery. But to know and believe that Christ suffered, not for himself, but for others, will avail us nothing, unless we have good ground to believe that he suffered for us. This is the discovery which it most deeply concerns us to make; and until we make it, we can have no solid and permanent peace. Many, I fear, have never seen the importance or necessity of having this question settled. They believe, generally, that Christ suffered for sinners; and they take for granted, on very insecure ground, that they will reap the benefit of his sufferings. But the believers, in whose name the prophet here speaks, were not so satisfied. They believed not only that Christ suffered for others than himself, but that he suffered for them. This was the discovery that filled their soul at once with sorrow and shame, because of their former blindness and unbelief, and with a joy which no man could take from them. It is a discovery which sinners may still make. And is it not worthy of all the efforts which we can make to attain to it,—worthy of diligent searching of the Scriptures, as to our warrant for laying hold of Christ and his salvation,—worthy of fervent, watchful, and persevering prayer,—and worthy of patient and unceasing waiting on God for those communications of his grace which may enable us to appropriate to ourselves the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel? And can any be in earnest about their salvation who can rest contented without being able to say, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows?"

XXVII.

CHRIST'S HUMILIATION.

ISAIAH LIII. 5, 6.

IT has been said by a learned commentator, in reference to the passage before us, that if vicarious suffering can be described in words, it is so described in these two verses ; that is to say, if the doctrine of Christ's substitution in the room of the guilty, bearing the penalty of their sins in their stead, can be expressed in words, that doctrine is so expressed here. It would appear, indeed, that the Holy Spirit dictated this precious truth in every form and variety of expression that could prevent the possibility of its being disputed or misunderstood. It is asserted five times within the limits of these two verses, and each time in language so plain and explicit that any one of them were sufficient to convince an anxious and humble inquirer that it is designed to set forth Christ as suffering for sinners, the just for the unjust, that he might bring them to God. But it is re-asserted again and again, as if for the purpose of silencing gainsayers, and preventing them from even attempting to shake the faith of the humble and contrite sinner in a truth which can alone bring peace to his conscience, and awaken hope in his soul when agitated by the fears of conscious guilt. Gainsayers, indeed, have not been prevented from attempting to controvert this truth ; for what will not gainsayers attempt to do ? Men, in the enmity of their carnal mind against God, crucified and slew the Lord of glory. No wonder that others, under the influence of the same enmity, should deny the efficacy

of his death, and labour either to pervert the plain and explicit language of Scripture on the subject, or, when that fails them, to call in question the authority of Scripture altogether. And certainly there is no passage of Scripture, bearing upon the design and consequences of Christ's death, which the enemies of the doctrine of the atonement have found it more difficult to dispose of or to explain away than that before us; for no ingenuity can ever set aside the plain and most explicit language in which the substitution of Christ in the room of sinners, bearing the punishment of their offences, is here repeatedly asserted. And yet this passage is only an example of the great care which is everywhere taken in Scripture to place and to keep this great truth clearly before the mind of all who read or hear the Word of God. The doctrine of vicarious suffering,—of a victim bleeding and dying in the room of men as sinners, as having forfeited their life, and therefore doomed to die,—this doctrine was taught from the beginning, and was so embodied in the ordinances of Old Testament times, that unless it be admitted, these ordinances would be absolutely inexplicable and without meaning. Considered as so many announcements and illustrations of that doctrine, they are alike most significant and interesting,—a continued and most impressive representation of Him who in the fulness of time offered himself without spot to God, the one great atoning sacrifice for sin. The prophets, too, were commissioned to announce in words the great truth which was thus permanently embodied in the divine institutions,—even the doctrine of a suffering Saviour; for everywhere, even amidst all that they set forth of his majesty and greatness, they did testify beforehand the sufferings of Christ, as well as the glory that was to follow.

And in the New Testament the same truth is continually urged upon our attention, as constituting the great subject of apostolic preaching, and is often expressed even in the very language of this passage, or in such terms as plainly to show that it was referred to as containing a clear and comprehensive statement of that great fundamental doctrine. And in what an affecting light has God presented to us his grace and mercy, in the care which has thus been taken to keep constantly before us the two great truths which it does most nearly concern us as-

surely to believe and habitually to remember,—namely, the penalty which as sinners we have incurred, and the endurance of that penalty by the Son of God in our room! Of all the representations which have been, or which can be given of the guilt, and misery, and helplessness of our fallen state, the most appalling is that which is exhibited in the death of Christ, as the only expiatory sacrifice that could atone for our sins, and satisfy the demands of divine justice in our stead. The Scriptures, indeed, do frequently, and in various forms of expression, set forth the guilt and helplessness of sinners; as when they tell us that the whole world is “guilty before God,”—that “all have sinned,” and that “the wages of sin is death,”—that “judgment has come upon all men to condemnation,”—and that no man can save himself, or by any means “redeem his brother.” But our miserable condition is still more emphatically described when it is declared, that if we are redeemed from the curse of the law, it is Christ who has redeemed us by being made a curse for us; that if we have been ransomed from the condition in which we lay, while bound over to endure the sentence of that law, it is Christ who has bought us with his own blood; that if we have been reconciled unto God, it is because Christ poured out his soul an offering for our sin. And thus it is, that while there is set before us, in the darkest colours in which it can be exhibited, our state of sin and misery, there is also presented to us, in connection therewith, the precious truth that a ransom has been found for us, and the gracious assurance that the ransom has been paid. Till we are convinced of our sin and misery, we shall see no form nor comeliness in Christ, nor any beauty that we should desire him. But if we were so convinced,—if we really felt that we are lost, and, at the same time, did not know assuredly that Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost,—how utterly wretched and hopeless should our condition be! But the very truth which is employed to give us the deepest insight into the evil and deformity of sin is that also which proclaims to us deliverance alike from its punishment and its pollution,—even the marvellous truth that Christ bare the sins of his people in his own body on the tree. And hence it was, that when the apostle entered in among the Gentiles, he determined not to know any thing among them, “save

Jesus Christ, and him crucified,"—because Christ crucified is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God" unto salvation. And hence his triumphant language when he exclaimed, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

And such also, in some measure or degree, will be the sentiment of all true believers, as this passage does strikingly exemplify. Here the prophet, as we have already seen, states in very explicit language, and in various forms of expression, that Christ suffered not for himself, but for others, even for the ungodly, that he might reconcile them to God. But the prophet does not record this truth simply as a revelation which was vouchsafed to him, and which he was to give forth to others. He was directed by the Spirit to put it into the mouth of those who were witnesses of what Christ did and endured, but who were so perplexed thereby as to be ready to conclude that he must, in some mysterious way, have incurred the displeasure of God, and that he was stricken, smitten, and afflicted on his own account, until they made the glorious discovery that he had suffered for their sake. This passage, then, does not merely declare, in the most explicit terms, the great doctrine of Christ's vicarious suffering, or his substitution in the room of sinners, but expresses very emphatically the feelings and sentiments of those who had attained to the well-grounded hope that he suffered and died for them. At one time, they did not know or understand that they needed any other kind of deliverance than such as mere power could work out for them,—such as that which Jesus wrought when he said to the lame, "Rise up and walk," or when he authoritatively declared, as he sometimes did, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." For all this, which was the very deliverance that they longed for, they saw nothing necessary on the part of the Messiah but a divine authority and a divine power. They did not perceive, even with all that the Old Testament Scriptures had taught them, that Messiah had to purchase, if I may so speak, the authority to forgive sins, by himself enduring to the uttermost the penalty due to sin. When Jesus, therefore, instead of continuing to exercise a divine power in healing the sick, and a divine authority in forgiving the guilty, was himself delivered up, the unresisting and

apparently weak and helpless victim of the fiercest and most iniquitous persecution which the malignity of men, instigated by the devil, had ever perpetrated, they felt as if they were forced to conclude, that for some mysterious cause he had incurred the divine displeasure, and was, therefore, not only deserted of men, but forsaken of God. But when they were taught by the Spirit of God to understand that it was only in virtue of these very sufferings that Christ could say, as he had frequently said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee,"—that it was thus only that he could become the author of eternal salvation to any,—and that if he was to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins, it was needful that he should humble himself unto the death ;—when they were brought to understand this, and, moreover, were enabled to believe that Christ had died for them, there was awakened in their minds a feeling of admiration and gratitude so profound and so engrossing that apparently they could not find words to express it. They dwell upon the sufferings of Christ, and on their own interest in these sufferings, as if they could think and speak of nothing else. They reckon up, as it were, the various forms or kinds of infliction which Christ endured, and they acknowledge of each that the procuring cause thereof was their guilt. As if calling to remembrance what they had witnessed while Jesus hung upon the cross, nailed to the accursed tree, and pierced with the spear, and as if recollecting the unworthy and perplexing thoughts with which that spectacle had once filled them, they exclaim with feelings, we may be assured, both of humiliation and wonder, "But he was wounded," or pierced, "for our transgressions."

Nor was it only the outward visible suffering of Christ, such as the malignity of man, instigated by Satan, might have inflicted, that was the subject of their profound and wondering meditation. They seem to have discovered that there was something beyond all this,—something infinitely more appalling in the sufferings of Messiah than any thing that the malignity of men and devils could inflict ; for when they say, as we find them doing in the second clause of the verse, "He was bruised," or crushed, "for our iniquities," they, or rather the Spirit speaking by them, must refer, I think, to the mysterious infliction which Christ endured, when he "began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy,"—

when his soul was "exceeding sorrowful even unto death,"—when, "being in an agony, . . . his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground," and he "prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,"—and when, bearing the sins of his people in his own body on the tree, he exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And while they had thus discovered, and were forward to acknowledge, what their transgressions deserved, and what was required to be endured as the punishment of their iniquities, they had an equally clear apprehension of the value and the efficacy of what Christ endured in their room and for their sake. This they very plainly declare, when, in going on to represent the sufferings of Christ in all the various lights in which these could be set forth, they, at the same time, express their confident assurance that the purpose for which Christ suffered was accomplished. Having spoken of Christ as wounded or pierced, and confessed that it was their transgressions that pierced him,—and having represented him as bruised or crushed, acknowledging that it was the burden of their iniquities that did so sorely press upon him,—they proceed to set forth his sufferings as chastisement or punishment, at the same time acknowledging that this, too, was on their account,—that it was the chastisement which procured for them reconciliation and peace with God. And, finally, they describe the sufferings of Christ, generally, as stripes, and again express their sure and settled hope that by these stripes they were healed, that their conscience had been pacified, and that an efficacious remedy had been provided for all their spiritual diseases.

Such appears to me to be the import of this remarkable verse. It was not only a prophecy of what Christ was to suffer, and of the purpose for which he suffered, to be verified when he appeared and endured to the very letter all that was here foretold of him, but a prediction, also, of the blessed fruits of his sufferings, as these were to be reaped by all who should believe in him; and, therefore, a prediction for the fulfilment of which every believer may appeal to his own personal experience. The discovery which those persons made who gave utterance to the language in this verse, was not merely that they relinquished an erroneous opinion, and adopted a true one, regarding the purpose

for which Messiah appeared in an humble condition, and in that condition was despised, persecuted, crucified, and slain. That discovery, while it brought light to their understanding, imparted also life to their souls, and made them partakers of everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. It revealed to them more than they had before seen or conceived of their guiltiness and sin; but it revealed to them also the precious truth, that their guilt, in all its extent and aggravation, had been fully atoned for, and for ever blotted out. It presented to them, in a very humbling light, their former blindness, ignorance, and carnal prejudices; but it gave them the assurance, also, that an efficacious remedy had been provided for these, and all their other spiritual maladies, and that this remedy had already begun to exercise its healing virtue on their souls. Does our experience furnish the same evidence of the fulfilment of this prophecy? We all know, as a truth addressed to our understanding, that Christ suffered for sinners, and gave his life a ransom for many. But is the belief of this truth accompanied with any such communication of light, and life, and spiritual comfort to our souls, as we have now been speaking of? And is it with a feeling of personal obligation to Christ,—is it with unfeigned love and gratitude to him,—and is it with the lively hope of being hereafter for ever with him, that we can say, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed?”

That such ought to be, and in some measure must be, the experience of all who really believe in Christ, is farther evident from what is recorded in the next verse. There the same persons who gave utterance, in the verse already considered, to their faith, and hope, and gratitude, are still represented as speaking, and as stating in a single sentence, the sum and substance of the Gospel, the whole revelation of the plan of man's redemption. Already they had dwelt with admiration and gratitude on the sufferings of Christ, contemplating them in all their variety and intenseness, and recognising in them all the penalty which they had incurred, the punishment that was due to their sins. But as if unwilling to leave the subject, as if they had not yet expressed, with sufficient force and clearness, all the admiration and gratitude which they felt, they repeat, in language if pos-

sible still more explicit, all that they had previously said of the sufferings of Christ, and the great purpose for which he endured them: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." I need hardly remark, that there is not to be found in Scripture, not even in the New Testament, a clearer and more comprehensive statement of the great plan of redemption than is contained in these words. The fall and the recovery, —man's state of sin and misery,—and his deliverance from that state by a Redeemer, are here set forth as plainly and unequivocally as it is possible for language to do. Indeed, we find the very words of the prophet quoted in the New Testament, as expressing, with the greatest possible clearness, man's ruined condition, and his redemption by the death of Christ. Thus, the apostle Peter says that Christ did "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." And in other passages, where the prophet's words are not expressly quoted, there is an obvious allusion to them, especially to the figure here employed to set forth the misery and helplessness of men in their fallen and unconverted state,—even that of sheep going astray. Thus we are told, that when Jesus "saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." And that he referred not to any bodily fatigue or temporal inconvenience, but to the spiritual destitution under which he saw them labouring, is obvious from what he immediately added; for he said unto his disciples, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." And the figure of strayed and wandering sheep does very emphatically express the miserable and destitute condition of men as alienated from God, and exposed to all the ills which necessarily flow from that alienation. It conveys the idea of ignorance, want, and danger. They have forsaken God, and have cut themselves off from all communication with the fountain of life and happiness; but they are insensible to their loss; they know not, and cannot be made

to understand, the nature of the blessedness which they have forfeited ; they have forgotten God, and are unwilling to be reminded of him ; they have no desire to be acquainted with him, or to retain him in their knowledge. They are weary, too, and in want. They seek rest, but cannot find it. They labour to make themselves happy ; but they labour in the fire, and weary themselves for very vanity. Their life is a continued round of experiments, in every one of which there is disappointment enough to convince them that a satisfying portion is not to be found in any one earthly thing, nor in all earthly enjoyments put together ; but they are not convinced. They may fret and be impatient, and thereby greatly aggravate their disappointments ; but having given themselves to the pursuit of vanity, they become every day more and more vain. They continue still to walk in the sight of their own eyes, and after the desires of their own heart. Every new scheme which they devise, in the vain hope of finding in it the satisfaction which they failed to find in every previous one, only leads them farther away from God, rendering them less willing to return to him, or even to think of him, and less capable of understanding or enjoying the happiness which flows from his favour and fellowship. And if they are thus in a state of ignorance and destitution even amidst all the earthly gratifications which they may enjoy, they are every moment exposed to danger the most appalling, but of which they are little, if at all aware. I refer not to danger of a mere temporal kind,—the ruin that may at any one moment overtake their worldly plans, and disappoint for ever the fondest of their hopes and the fairest of their prospects. A far more terrible calamity than this hangs continually over them ; and the cause of it is in themselves. Their alienation from God is not a mere misfortune ; it is a guilty alienation. They have not only forfeited his favour and lost his fellowship, but they have incurred his displeasure. Judgment has come upon them to condemnation ; and if they die in this state, the sentence becomes irrevocable. And how soon may it become so ? For any thing they know, there may be but a step between them and death. And yet, like strayed sheep, they wander on, insensible alike to the blessedness which they have left behind, and to the misery which awaits them before. Even after many

worldly disappointments, they still flatter themselves that they may yet succeed better, and be happy. But even if they should succeed up to, or perhaps beyond their expectations, and should be ready to say, Now we are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" still, they are in reality "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Such, then, was the unhappy, destitute, and perilous condition of men, when Christ came to seek them out in their wandering, and to bring them back to God. And surely the appearance of so glorious a person, and on so gracious an errand, was fitted to arouse men to a sense of their folly as well as their guilt in having forsaken God, and to awaken in their minds a desire to return to him. The marvellous fact that he had come for such a purpose was itself the strongest assurance which they could obtain that God was willing to receive them; and with such an assurance, the invitation of Him who condescended to call himself the good Shepherd ought to have been gladly heard and eagerly embraced. But had Christ, then, nothing more to do to bring sinners again to God, than merely to announce to them that there was a way by which they might return, and to entreat them to avail themselves thereof,—to throw down the weapons of their rebellion, to turn from their evil ways, and come again to Him from whom they had revolted and gone astray? Would Christ have done all that it was necessary for him to do, if he had just appeared as the great Shepherd who had come to gather the wandering and scattered sheep,—had exercised his divine skill and tenderness in winning them back to God,—or even put forth his divine power in persuading and constraining them to return? No, this was not all that was necessary for Christ to undertake and do, to restore sinners again to the favour and fellowship of God. There was something else required of him, without which he could neither have invited them to return to God, nor have put forth any divine influence or power to persuade them to return. The prophet does not say, "All we like sheep have gone astray," and the Lord sent him,—that is, Christ,—to call us back. He says, "All we like sheep have gone astray, . . . and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." This was the necessary qualification for his becoming the Shepherd, to gather and restore the scattered

sheep. Unless he had undertaken to bear their iniquity, and to make an atonement for their guilt, he never could have announced to them the glad tidings of a gracious God willing to be reconciled to them, and entreating them to be reconciled unto him. And so he did himself declare in the days of his flesh, when he proclaimed himself the good Shepherd, at the same time expressly saying, "The good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." This was essential to their recovery; and such was his love for them, that rather than see them for ever wandering outcasts from the only fold in which they could be saved, and go in and out and find pasture, he willingly laid down his life for them. They had gone astray. They must bear their sin, and so perish; or another must bear it in their room, that they might escape. Christ undertook to bear it; and so the Lord laid on him the iniquity of them all.

It was on the strength of this undertaking, and in the certainty of his accomplishing it, that he personally proclaimed, during his manifestation in the flesh, pardon and peace to all who received him, giving them power to become the sons of God. It was on the same ground that he sent forth the twelve to proclaim to the lost sheep of the house of Israel the glad tidings of the kingdom. And it is in consequence of his having finished the work which his Father gave him to do, even bearing the iniquity of all his people in his own body on the tree, that repentance and remission of sins continue to be preached to all nations in his name. And being thus qualified to be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, having made reconciliation for the sins of the people, has he any thing more to do than merely to invite sinners to come to God by him, assuring them that they shall find mercy? Have men heard that invitation with gladness, and embraced it with gratitude, eager to return to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls, and by him to be restored to the favour and fellowship of God? Alas! how different is the reception which his gracious message has met with! In spite of all that was winning in his divine condescension and compassion; and all that was melting in the expressions of his divine love, and all that was glorious in the manifestation of his divine power,—a power uniformly exercised in deeds of mercy and beneficence,—he was himself personally despised and

rejected of men, and at last taken, and with wicked hands crucified and slain. So in some measure it fared with those whom he commissioned to carry on the great work which he had begun,—that of preaching the Gospel, proclaiming a free pardon to the guilty through his blood; for they, too, were reviled, and persecuted, and put to death for his name's sake. And what reason has there been, in every subsequent age, to say with the prophet, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" It is not enough, then, that Christ has suffered, and, in virtue of his suffering, has invited sinful, perishing, apostate men to come unto him that they may have life. All this would avail nothing, did not the Holy Spirit interpose to convince men of their sin and misery,—to enlighten their minds in the knowledge of Christ,—to renew their wills,—and so persuade and enable them to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to them in the Gospel; for "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost."

XXVIII.

CHRIST'S HUMILIATION.

ISAIAH LIII. 7-9.

NONE, I think, who are familiar with the writings of the evangelists, can read the 7th verse of this chapter without feeling that no eye-witness could have described more accurately, or in a manner more affecting, the demeanour of the Lord Jesus, under his complicated and unexampled suffering, than the prophet has here done. He has, in fact, given us in one short but most comprehensive sentence, the substance of what occupies a large space in the latter portion of the Gospel history, both as to the nature of Christ's sufferings, and the manner in which he submitted to them. The expression, "He was oppressed," calls up to our recollection, not one, but many instances, recorded in the Gospel history, of the most wanton oppression and outrage that were perpetrated against him,—oppression, in the true sense of that word, inasmuch as, besides the mockery and insult with which the multitude loaded him, those who were entrusted with the administration of the law not only passed upon him what they knew to be an unjust and iniquitous sentence, but, by the most flagrant abuse of the authority, or rather the power, which the law gave them, put forth that power in every possible way to embitter the execution of that sentence. And not less expressive is the word "afflicted," as here applied to Christ. The term rendered "afflicted" has also the signification of meek or patient, and is, indeed, so rendered in reference to Moses, when

it is said, "The man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." The clause, then, may be rendered, He was oppressed, but he was patient, and opened not his mouth. And when so understood, how truly does it describe the Saviour under the oppression which he endured, as is testified at length by all the evangelists! And the expression becomes still more emphatic, if, as some commentators think, the word rendered "patient" implies also the idea of willing submission,—patiently enduring what might be resisted or prevented. But whether the expression here used implies it or not, we know that it was true. We know that he willingly gave his consent to endure all that came upon him; for we have his own recorded declaration, "I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." And this we must bear in mind, if we would see the full force of what the prophet here states, when he says, "He was oppressed," but he was meek or patient, and "he opened not his mouth."

Though he did more than once testify for the truth, even in the presence of his unjust judges, yet no expression of complaint or threatening did he utter. He permitted miserable, infatuated men to work their will against him, even those who had witnessed his divine power in miracles of mercy. He endured patiently, in silence, the "contradiction of sinners against himself." So he acted in the presence of the Jewish council, when false witnesses were brought to testify against him; for to all that they testified he answered nothing. With the same forbearance and meekness did he endure the blasphemous mockery and insults with which he was loaded by those who held him, when they smote him, and blindfolded him, and "struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?" Such was his demeanour, also, at the judgment-seat of Pilate; for though he there avowed who he was, as he had done in the Jewish council, yet to all the accusations of the chief priests and elders he answered nothing,—nay, when Pilate asked him, saying, "Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? . . . he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly." So, in like manner, he acted in the presence of Herod, who, for the gratification of his own ungodly

curiosity, or it may be for farther soothing his guilty conscience, which had been disturbed by the report of Christ's miracles, had been "desirous to see him of a long season," and "hoped to have seen some miracle done by him." He accordingly "questioned with him in many words," while "the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him;" but "he answered him nothing." And, finally, when he was led, literally, "as a lamb to the slaughter," meek, unresisting, and innocent; when, fainting and weary, he was compelled to carry his cross; when he was nailed to the tree, not only enduring the torture of crucifixion, but subject to the mockery of the most profane and ungodly of men, who turned his very miracles of beneficence into a subject of blasphemous railery, wagging their head, and saying "He saved others; himself he cannot save: if he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe;"—even then he was patient and "opened not his mouth." He spoke indeed; but it was in kindness to others, not to vindicate himself. He addressed the women, who from a natural, and, it may be, also a gracious feeling of sympathy, wept on beholding his unexampled sufferings. But it was to say to them, in language of kind and compassionate warning, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." He spoke to his mother and his beloved disciple, who stood by, not to draw forth their pity towards himself, but to commend them to each other's affectionate regard. "He saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!" and "to the disciple, Behold thy mother!" He addressed also the thief that was crucified with him; but it was in the exercise of that sovereign grace and power which, in virtue of his own death, he acquired, to quicken and to bestow eternal life on whomsoever he would: "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." He spoke, too, of his persecutors; but it was not to accuse, but to pray for them: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Of his own wrongs he spoke not in the way either of complaint or of threatening; and when he did give utterance to an expression of pain, wrung from his holy human soul in the extremity of suffering, it served only to bring out more fully, and in a more revolting form, the desperate malignity of his enemies. When, in the agony of crucifixion, he said, "I thirst,"—"the soldiers mocked him, coming to him, and

offering him vinegar,"—yea, "they gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall." And when, under the hiding of his Father's face, and the mysterious anguish of spirit which for a season he endured, he was constrained to exclaim, "Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?"—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—they that stood by said, "Let us see whether Elias will come and save him." We have thus, in the simple and numerous facts recorded in the Gospel history, a commentary on the verse before us; and when the apostle Peter, himself an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ, would set forth the manner in which he endured these sufferings, as a practical lesson to believers, he virtually quotes the statement of the prophet: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: . . . who, when he was reviled, reviled not again: when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, . . . by whose stripes ye were healed." So full, so comprehensive, and so emphatic are the words in the passage under consideration, "He was oppressed, but he was patient, and opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

As in the whole of the Saviour's preceding life, so in the patience and meekness with which he endured ignominy, insult, and death, there was something altogether divine,—a spectacle which might well have awakened some misgivings in the most seared consciences regarding the horrid deed which was perpetrated. But as if there had not been one tender spot in the conscience of his murderers, they converted his very meekness into a proof of his guilt. It is plain, from what is recorded in the Gospel history, that until they had actually succeeded in taking Christ, and found that he was in their power, there had been some lurking fear or suspicion in their mind, not only that the multitude might peradventure take his part, but that there might be a manifestation of some mysterious power, which would not only baffle their scheme, but crush and ruin them. But the moment that they succeeded in taking him without resistance on his part, and without the appearance of an interposition on his behalf from any quarter, they gave loose to their malignant joy and satisfaction, eager to take revenge upon him for what they

had suffered of uneasy fear and suspicion on his account. They regarded his unresisting meekness as a proof of utter helplessness; and while they rejoiced to see that the multitude, so far from taking part with him, had actually turned against him, they did especially exult in the thought that he was disowned and deserted of God. They did themselves confess this, and in a manner the most impious and revolting,—clearly showing that his life and miracles had awakened in their minds some secret dread, which till that moment they had not been able to throw off. “He trusted in God,” said they; “let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” The very patience, therefore,—the unresisting meekness with which Jesus suffered,—was held by his enemies as proof of his guilt; and we cannot doubt that it was the occasion of perplexity even to those who “trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.” For their sakes, therefore, and in order to remove their perplexities, the prophet proceeds, in the 8th verse, to assure them, that notwithstanding all that they had seen him suffer in apparent weakness, and, as men might think, in guiltiness and sin, he had passed through these very sufferings into a glorious and endless life, inasmuch as the death which he suffered was not on his own account, but for Jehovah’s people,—those whom he had given to Christ to redeem. “He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.”

The expression, “he was taken,” signifies, he was taken up, exalted, or raised above. He was taken up, then, from prison,—that is, from oppression and distress in every form, and from judgment. He had been subjected to an unjust and iniquitous judgment by men; and he had voluntarily undertaken to endure, on behalf of his people, the righteous judgment which the divine law had passed upon them. But from both he had been taken up. From the unjust judgment of men he had been vindicated by the great Lawgiver and Judge who exalted him; and his exaltation was a proof, also, that he had borne to the uttermost the judgment which had come upon his people to condemnation. “And who,” says the prophet, “shall declare his generation?”—that is, his life, the period or duration of his life. The life which

he lived on earth in a state of humiliation, was cut off by a death which might seem premature as well as violent. But who, says the prophet, can declare his life, or tell the duration thereof?—a very emphatic assertion, that from a state of oppression,—a life of few days, but these full of sorrows as no man's days ever were,—he entered on a life endless as well as unspeakably glorious. The prophet adds, "For he was cut off out of the land of the living,"—that is, he suffered a violent death. But it was not on his own account, nor did it imply that he had done any violence, or that deceit had ever been found in his mouth. It was for others, as Jehovah himself here declares: "For the transgression of my people was he stricken." His life, then, was not to be reckoned or estimated by the period of his humiliation,—a season of sorrow and suffering, terminating in a cruel and ignominious death, as if that death had been for his own sin, under the penalty of which he was for ever to remain. His enemies, no doubt, wished and believed that it would be so: for their thoughts and purposes towards him were those which their fathers had cherished towards the prophet Jeremiah, when he said of them, "But I was like a lamb, or an ox, that is brought to the slaughter: and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered." The murderers of the Lord were willing to believe that they had accomplished all this in regard to him; and, no doubt, flattered themselves that the revival of his name and his cause was rendered for ever hopeless, when they went to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again; command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day," and when, with Pilate's consent, "they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch." But even from the prison-house of the grave he was to rise in triumph, and enter on a state of glory which none can conceive, a life of days which none can number. Then was to be fulfilled the declaration of the Psalmist, "The king shall joy in thy strength, O Lord; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. For thou preventest him with the blessings of good-

ness : thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever." Nor was it for himself only that this request was made and granted. The reward of all his sufferings is the salvation of his people, whereby his Father is glorified. For them he asked a share in all that he asked for himself,—and he obtained it. As it was for their transgression that he was stricken, so, because he lives, they shall live also.

Such, I think, is the general scope and import of the 8th verse. While the prophet asserts again, in very explicit terms, what had been repeatedly asserted in the preceding verses,—namely, the vicarious nature of Christ's sufferings and death as an atonement for the sins of his people,—he announces also the acceptance of that atonement by Jehovah, the Lawgiver and Judge, as a satisfaction to the demands of divine justice. And he declares, moreover, that in consequence of this satisfaction, Christ entered on an endless life of glory and honour, being not only vindicated from the unjust judgment which men had passed upon him, but from all the sorrow and suffering which, by the judgment of the divine law, he was required to endure, when he placed himself in the room of sinners. The prophet then proceeds to foretell an event,—speaking of it, as usual, as if it were past,—whereby God was to give an intimation of his acceptance of Christ's atonement, his approbation of the whole of Christ's finished work : "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth;" or, as the words may be rendered, "He was to have made his grave with the wicked; but he was with the rich in his death." The obvious meaning of the passage is, that Jesus was not buried, or his body was not disposed of, in the way intended by those who put him to death. It is recorded by Jewish writers as a common usage, that malefactors who were put to death were either left unburied, or, as a mark of disgrace, they were promiscuously buried in an unclean place. When we consider, then, the peculiarly bitter and malignant hatred which the Jews bore to Jesus,—the desperate energy with which they prosecuted, and at last accomplished, their deadly purpose,—and the ingenuity with which they invented modes of loading him with mockery and insult,—we never could

have doubted, even though we had not been here told, that it was their design that the body of Jesus should be subjected to every indignity that was wont to be offered to the worst of malefactors.

The prediction, then, that Messiah, though destined by his murderers to be dealt with as malefactors were wont to be, was not to be so dealt with, but, instead of being buried in an unclean place among those who were reckoned accursed, was to make his grave with the rich;—this prediction, I say, was a very remarkable one, and one, moreover, the fulfilment of which was, humanly speaking, most unlikely, and never more unlikely than at the very instant before it was accomplished. Of the innumerable multitudes that witnessed the wanton cruelties to which the meek and holy sufferer was subjected, there was but one solitary voice raised in his defence,—and that was the dying thief by his side. And who, then, of that multitude was likely to brave his infuriated, and now triumphant persecutors, by interposing to rescue his lifeless body from the last indignity which human malignity could offer to it. None of the disciples had courage to do so; the boldest of their number had, a few hours before, denied him. And what, then, remained but that the body of Jesus should be disposed of as those of malefactors were, and as his enemies had from the first intended? God had purposed otherwise, and had otherwise foretold by the mouth of his prophet; and his purpose could not be defeated, nor could his word fail of being fulfilled. It was to be fulfilled, moreover, in a way which was in striking harmony with those manifestations of divine grace and power which marked that memorable season. It was in the midst of weakness, as the helpless victim of men's lawless and ungodly passions, and in the very agony of crucifixion, that Christ spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, and triumphing over them in his cross. In token of his victory, and as an earnest of its fruits, he gave repentance, and the remission of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified, to the thief upon the cross. And hardly less marvellous was the grace manifested in Joseph of Arimathea, whereby he was strengthened to do what none, even the bravest, and professedly the most devoted, of the disciples of Jesus dared to attempt. He, too, was a disciple indeed; but

hitherto so timid, so much in bondage to the fear of man, so unwilling to peril his worldly interests for the sake of his discipleship, that he had never till that hour professed his faith in Jesus, not even during the period when as yet the multitude had not been persuaded to turn against him. And was it to be expected, then, that when Jesus had been betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and forsaken by all,—when he had been condemned and insulted at every tribunal in Jerusalem,—and crucified in the most ignominious manner, amidst the execrations of the multitude ;—was it to be expected, I say, that this timid, shrinking disciple should be the man who was fearlessly to undertake what none of Christ's professing disciples had the faith or fortitude to do? Yet so it was. He braved the ridicule, the reproach, the danger which he might incur by the step he took,—danger tenfold greater than that which had previously deterred him from acknowledging Christ. It does not appear, indeed, that he encountered any opposition, or that he was actually exposed to danger in the execution of his affectionate enterprise. But how was he to know that he would not? How could he suppose that he would be permitted to do honour to the body of Jesus, without drawing down upon himself the vengeance of those by whom Jesus had been crucified, and who must have interpreted Joseph's conduct as a direct and unqualified condemnation of all that they had done? This he must have been prepared to encounter when he resolved on the step which he took; and if he did not encounter it, we can only ascribe it to the overruling power of Him who shut the lions' mouths in the presence of his prophet, and who restrained the still more ferocious passions of ungodly men, till, by the hand of one hitherto among the weakest of his servants, he should execute his purpose and fulfil his word. And with respect to Joseph himself, he experienced the faithfulness of the declaration recorded by this same prophet, "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Having taken his resolution, his faith faltered not, nor did his fortitude fail him; for it is expressly said by the evangelist Mark, that he "went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus." And having obtained leave, he took the body, and with the help of another disciple, hitherto as weak in faith and as

timid as himself, namely, Nicodemus, who at the first came to Jesus by night, he wrapped the body in clean linen, and laid it in his own new tomb, wherein was never man yet laid. And thus was fulfilled what is here written by the prophet, "He was to have made his grave with the wicked; but he was with the rich in his death."

I have remarked that the prediction before us, when fulfilled, was an intimation that God had approved and accepted the Messiah's finished work, as a full satisfaction to the claims of divine justice, and a complete atonement for the sins of his people. The ground of this remark is, that after Christ said on the cross, "It is finished," and "bowed his head, and gave up the ghost," a special providence interposed to prevent farther insults or indignities being offered to him. Up to that moment, men and devils were permitted, without let or hindrance, to work all their will, and to let loose all their malignity against him. Devils tempted him with all the mysterious influence which they possessed, for it was the hour of their unrestrained power; and men,—devils incarnate,—exhausted their malignant ingenuity in devising methods of insulting as well as afflicting him. They arrayed him in robes of mock royalty,—they placed a crown of thorns upon his head,—they paid him mock homage,—they made his divine compassion and mercy, as manifested in the countless multitudes of the sick whom he healed, and of the afflicted whom he comforted, the subject of their blasphemous merriment,—they buffeted and spit upon him. All this they were allowed to do without restraint. But from the moment that he could say, "It is finished," a restraint was laid on their guilty passions, which prevented farther insults being either unwittingly or designedly offered to him. He was, indeed, after this, pierced with a spear, for a special purpose, and that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "They shall look on him whom they pierced." But when they came to do what was commonly done to those who were crucified,—namely, to break his legs,—they did it not, for they found that he was already dead; and it had been predicted, "A bone of him shall not be broken." And, in like manner, when they would have buried him with the wicked, even in the grave of malefactors, this also was prevented, as we have seen, and "he was with the rich in his death." All this

testified that his work was finished, and that no farther indignity was permitted to be offered to him. And this is the reason assigned by the prophet: "He was to have made his grave with the wicked, but he was with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." The expression is peculiar, especially as a reason why he was not permitted to be insulted after his death; for as he never was and never could be chargeable with either violence or deceit, that might have been a reason why he should not be exposed to indignity and insult in his lifetime, as well as after his death. But it must be borne in mind that the two leading charges brought against Jesus were, first, the crime of which he was accused at the judgment-seat of Pilate,—which, though not the first in order of time, was that on which he was really condemned,—namely, that he was a mover of sedition, and an enemy to Cæsar's government, and consequently a man of violence,—one who, for the sake of his own ambitious schemes, would involve his country in all the terrible consequences of a rebellion; and, secondly, the charge brought against him before the Jewish council,—namely, that of being a blasphemer, by the character which he assumed, and consequently an impostor or deceiver. When it is here said, therefore, that "he was with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth," there may be a reference to these two charges, implying that the manner of his burial was a refutation by God himself of those charges,—a proof that he was taken up or vindicated from the false judgment of men, as asserted in the preceding verse.

But while I think that there is a great deal of truth in all this, and truth, too, that is full of interest and instruction, yet even this does not exhaust the meaning of the verse. The statement that "he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth," must imply, from the connection in which it is introduced, not only that he was clear from these particular sins of which he was specially accused, and of all other sins whatever, but that he had executed faithfully the mission on which he had been sent,—that he had neither exceeded nor come short of the commandment which, as Jehovah's servant, he had received,—that he had finished the work which his Father gave him to do. This, I apprehend, is the main point in the prophet's statement,

—that which he assigns as the reason why God interposed, by his special providence, and in the exercise of his grace towards a weak, if not a wavering disciple, making him the instrument of preventing any farther indignity being offered to his only begotten and well-beloved Son. And the testimony which God thus gave to the perfect or finished work of Christ is rendered still more striking when we reflect how quickly it followed upon the Saviour's death,—as if the more clearly to show that it was his good pleasure to remove without delay any perplexity or doubt which his people might feel, on account of the humiliation and sufferings under which Messiah seemed to sink in weakness and desertion. There were, indeed, other testimonies borne, and borne immediately, to the acceptance of the Saviour's work, when it was finished; for when he cried with a loud voice, and yielded up the ghost, “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” But even amidst all these glorious attestations to the perfection and acceptance of Christ's mediatorial sufferings and death, the testimony foretold in this prophecy, and, when the time came, exhibited as we have seen, will never cease to be regarded with peculiar interest by humble and devout believers. While they see therein a very unequivocal testimony to the infinite value of that atoning sacrifice on which they have been taught to rely for pardon and acceptance with God, they see also a most encouraging example of the fruits of that atonement in the person of a weak and timid disciple. Amidst the glorious manifestations of the mighty power of God which accompanied or followed the Saviour's death, they behold the grace of God seeking out, and strengthening for a great and important work, one who, though rich in this world's wealth, had till then been afraid even to acknowledge Christ, and far less prepared therefore to undertake a dangerous enterprise for Christ's honour; and in this example they have the assurance, that feeble as they may be, yet when called by Christ to labour, or contend, or suffer for him, he will not send them a warfare on their own charges,—that his grace will be sufficient for them,—and that his strength will be perfected in their weakness.

XXIX.

CHRIST'S WORK, THE GROUND OF HIS EXALTATION.

ISAIAH LIII. 10-12.

THE word "Yet," with which the 10th verse begins, connects it with the preceding,—implying that, notwithstanding of what was there said concerning Messiah, it pleased Jehovah to bruise him. In that verse it is said that Christ, according to the purpose of his enemies, was to have made his grave with the wicked, or to have been buried with malefactors, but that this purpose was defeated, and he was with the rich in his death, for he was buried by a rich and honourable man in a new sepulchre, hewn out of a rock, wherein never man before was laid ; and the reason why his enemies were prevented from carrying their purpose into effect was, "because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." And if so,—if he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth,—if he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,—the question might naturally occur, Why did he suffer at all ? Why did not the same innocence which protected his lifeless body from indignity or insult, protect him also from being bruised and put to grief when he was alive ? This question is anticipated and answered in the passage before us. It is here distinctly stated, that though Christ did no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth,—though he was the Holy One and the Just ; yet it did, nevertheless, please Jehovah to bruise him, and put him to grief. But

the reason is also given why he was so dealt with ; and the reason is such as to show that his being preserved from the indignities and insults which wicked men would have offered to him after death, if they could, was perfectly consistent with his being wounded and bruised by the will and permission of Jehovah during his life. The reason for his being so bruised and put to grief was, that his soul might be an offering for sin. Till the moment that he did pour out his soul an offering for sin, it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to permit ungodly men, yea, and devils also, to put forth all their malignity and power against him. But when he had thus offered himself without spot to God,—when he had actually borne the burden of his people's guilt, and had atoned for it all,—when he could say of the work which his Father had given to do, "It is finished," no farther indignity was to be permitted towards him ; God, even the Father, as Lawgiver and Judge, was about to honour and glorify him, by raising from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. And among other intimations that were given of the approaching exaltation and glory of Christ, one was, that though his enemies intended that he should have made his grave with the wicked, yet, by the overruling providence of God, he was "with the rich in his death."

Though Christ, then, was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,—though he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth,—yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him, and put him to grief, because, in being so bruised and afflicted, he was to accomplish a work whereby God was to be glorified, and on account of which Christ also was to be highly exalted, and to receive a name that is above every name,—even the great work of making an atonement for sin, so that he might have power over all flesh, to give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him. Such is the view which our Lord himself has given of the purpose and the consequences of his mediatorial undertaking ; for when the time arrived at which he was to accomplish that undertaking, he "lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come ; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee : as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. . . . I have glorified thee on the earth : I have finished the work which thou

gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." All that the Saviour thus prayed for had been promised to him as the reward of his mediatorial work, and is, in substance, recorded in the passage before us. The subject of Messiah's glorification does, indeed, occupy a very large place in the Old Testament, and is frequently and very closely set forth both in express predictions and by typical representations. But nowhere, perhaps, is it foretold more closely in connection with his sufferings and death, as the ground of his exaltation, than in the passage before us; and on this account the prediction is peculiarly rich in consolation as well as instruction to the people of God. While Messiah's own personal exaltation is very distinctly foretold, great care is taken to keep continually before our minds the great, and to us most interesting truth, that the reason why he was to be so exalted and glorified was his having accomplished the work of his people's salvation. This truth is repeated in every form and variety of expression; and, indeed, their salvation is represented as itself constituting his glory and honour. Thus, in the 10th verse, it is said, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin,"—or, as it is rendered in the margin, "when his soul shall make an offering for sin,"—"he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." The blessings here promised to Christ as the reward of his work are expressed in language peculiarly forcible and emphatic, being used in obvious allusion to what in Old Testament times were represented as the greatest of all temporal blessings,—namely, a numerous offspring and long life. Thus, the very first promise given to Abraham was, "I will make of thee a great nation;" and frequently was he assured that his seed should be as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore. In like manner, we find Moses constantly urging upon the people of Israel a steadfast adherence to the commandments and ordinances of God, that so they might prolong their days in the land which the Lord their God was to give them. And when the apostle inculcated upon children obedience to parents according to the fifth commandment, he reminded them that it was the first commandment with promise,—the promise being, that their days should be long in the land

which the Lord their God gave them. These blessings, then, which occupied so large and prominent a place among the peculiar gifts of God to his people in the old time, are promised to Messiah in their true and spiritual sense. Indeed, the promise to Abraham was in reality a promise to Christ; for it was by Christ that the main or chief part of that promise was to be fulfilled, namely, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The number, then, or the multitude of Abraham's seed according to the flesh, was but a type or figure of the patriarch's spiritual seed, even true believers, of all countries and all times; for an inspired apostle has declared that Abraham is the father of all them that believe; for the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

The promise in the passage under consideration, then, was just a renewal of the promise made to Abraham, that in him all families of the earth were to be blessed; or, in other words, that Christ, as himself the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, should see, out of all the families of the earth, sons and daughters whom he was to bring unto glory, and of whom he might say, "Behold I and the children whom God hath given me." And the promise has already been largely fulfilled; for already a great multitude, out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation, and people, stand before the throne, and before the Lamb, saying, "Thou art worthy; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." But who can conceive the extent to which the promise will yet be fulfilled, when God shall again visit in mercy his ancient people,—when, after the ages of their rejection, the receiving of them into the Church of Christ will be to the world as life from the dead,—when Israel, with the fulness of the Gentiles, shall be brought in,—when the Deliverer, who has already come out of Zion, shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob,—when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. So, in like manner, has been fulfilled the second promise in the passage we are considering, "He shall prolong his days." Like the former, this was no new promise. The apostle has told us where we shall find it in various passages of the Old Testament Scriptures; as when he quotes the words of Jehovah the Father addressed to the Son, saying,

"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." And again, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." And with these examples of the application of Scripture prophecy to Messiah, as passing from a life of sorrow and suffering here, into a state of endless honour, and glory, and blessedness, we are warranted to apply to him in the same way many similar predictions; as, for example, that in which the Psalmist says, "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him; even length of days for ever and ever." And to the fulfilment of this promise Christ himself testifies in the communication which he vouchsafed to his servant John, when he said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

And with regard to the third promise, "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand," the accomplishment of it is necessarily implied in the fulfilment of the other two; for it is just a declaration that he would succeed in the great work of bringing many sons and daughters unto glory. It is not, however, a mere repetition of the preceding promises. It brings before us another distinct and most interesting truth. It tells us that the salvation of sinners is as much the pleasure of the Father as it is of the Son,—that Jehovah, as Lawgiver and Judge, not only looks upon Christ's work with complacency and approbation, as a full satisfaction to the demands of his justice, but is pleased with the salvation of sinners, as that which is in accordance with his divine beneficence,—and that he sees in the innumerable multitudes whom Christ is continually subduing unto himself, making them willing in a day of his power, the accomplishment of his own gracious purpose which his love dictated, when he "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And in what an affecting light does all this place the whole scheme of man's redemption! The salvation of sinners,—the conversion of men to God,—the subjugation of the ungodly to Christ, so as to become the willing subjects of his spiritual

government, is represented as at once the honour and glory of the Saviour, and that on which the Father looks with complacency and approbation. And who is there, even among the most sincere and affectionate of Christ's people, who does not stand amazed at his own coldness, and insensibility, and indifference, when he thinks that his conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, and that the Father and the Son have both declared that thereby they are glorified? How fearful the guilt of those who neglect or make light of the great salvation, which is represented as an ample reward to the Saviour for all that he did and endured to work it out! How lamentable to think that so many either treat the subject with indifference, or flatter themselves that they will participate, as a matter of course, in the benefits of Christ's death, though that death, with all the agony that preceded and accompanied it, has never interested or affected them half so much as ten thousand lying vanities have done! And how little have believers themselves seen of the value of their soul's salvation, compared with its importance in the eyes of Him who suffered and died to secure it, and who was encouraged to undertake and go through with the work by the promise in the passage before us, "When his soul shall make an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand!"

But the subject of those remarks is still farther illustrated by what is stated in the next verse: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." The import of this expression is abundantly obvious. The purpose for which Christ toiled, and suffered, and died, was to save sinners; and, therefore, to see of the travail of his soul is to see the accomplishment of that purpose,—to see in the salvation of his people the fruit of his labour, the attainment of the object for which he endured agony and death. And with this he is declared to be satisfied. He regards it as an ample reward of all that he did and suffered,—the fulfilment of that joy which was set before him, and for which "he endured the cross, despising the shame." This, then, is the measure of his love to sinners, and the estimate of the value which he puts on their souls. And who can conceive of either? His love was such as prompted him willingly to undertake, as their surety and substitute, to be made a curse for

them,—to endure the infliction of that wrath under which they lay; and having endured it, so precious are their souls in his sight, that their salvation is an ample recompense for all that he suffered. Of the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of such love, we can form no adequate conception,—it indeed passeth knowledge; and as little can we estimate the value of an immortal soul, and the preciousness of its salvation, as Christ estimates it. But surely there is enough in the statement before us to fill us with amazement at our own folly and infatuation, in having treated such love with indifference, and in having so often given to the veriest vanity a higher place in our regard than to the interests of our immortal souls. Though we cannot see the preciousness of a soul's redemption as Christ sees it, yet surely there is something very intelligible, as well as very solemn and affecting, in his own declaration, that in its salvation he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. Let us remember, moreover, that he says this, not merely as a divine person who knows, and who forms a righteous judgment or estimate of all things; but as God-man,—as one who knows experimentally what it is to be under the curse of the law, and who has actually endured the infliction of that wrath which is due to us for sin.

If, then, we believe what he says, when he declares that the salvation of souls, their deliverance from wrath, and their restoration to the favour of God, is to him a full reward for all that he suffered, is it possible that we can remain contented and at ease so long as we have no sure and solid ground of hope that his death has become available for our salvation? It is for the purpose of rousing us to serious concern for our souls, and to excite us to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, that in the passage under consideration, as well as everywhere else in Scripture, so much is said of the unspeakable importance of the great salvation, and the infinite value of the ransom that has been paid for our deliverance. And if we have been so awakened,—if it be to us the most interesting and momentous of all questions, how we shall be saved,—there is much in the passage before us to guide and help our inquiry. It is here testified by Jehovah himself concerning Christ, “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.” The ex-

pression, "by his knowledge," is equivalent to "by the knowledge of himself;" and the meaning of the passage, therefore, is, that Christ justifies sinners by bringing them to know him. And thus understood, it is in accordance with the general tenor of Scripture. Thus, "to know God," is an expression frequently employed to denote the whole of religion, and to describe the condition of those who are in a state of reconciliation with God. Of course, the expression means a great deal more than merely the knowledge or admission of the general truth that there is a God. The devils believe this, and tremble. To know God, in the scriptural sense of the expression, is to know God as he is revealed,—to have right apprehensions of his character and perfections, as set forth in his Word,—and to be affected or influenced by these, as they are fitted to affect or influence us. In this sense the expression is used in the 9th chapter of Jeremiah: "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." And so we find the expression used by our Lord himself in the 17th chapter of John: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

These words, it will be observed, do in substance express the very sentiments in the passage under consideration, "By the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many." "The servant of Jehovah," is an expression equivalent to "the sent of Jehovah," or, he who was sent of God; and it is by the knowledge of Christ in this character that men are justified, or obtain eternal life. And to know Christ savingly is to understand, and believe, and approve the testimony which God has given concerning his Son. That testimony is, in substance, that Christ willingly undertook to carry into effect the purpose of grace and mercy for the salvation of sinners, which originated in the love of the Father,—that for this purpose he took upon him human nature, and suffered to the uttermost all that was necessary to satisfy divine justice, in the room and on behalf of the guilty,

pouring out his soul an offering for sin,—that having thus finished the work which his Father gave him to do, he rose from the dead, and has been exalted at the right hand of God, a Prince and a Saviour,—that repentance and remission of sins are now preached in his name among all nations,—and that whosoever believeth on him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. To know Christ, then, is to understand and believe this testimony of God concerning him, wherein he is set forth as having suffered, the just for the unjust, taking away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And so the passage under consideration asserts; for after declaring that, by the knowledge of himself, Christ should justify many, it is added as the reason why this knowledge should be available for their justification, “For he shall bear their iniquities.” In other words, to know Christ savingly is to know him as having borne our iniquities,—or, as the apostle expresses it, “having borne our sins in his own body on the tree.”

And do we thus know Christ? It is not enough that we know, as mere facts or propositions, all that is recorded in the Bible concerning Christ. These facts or statements may be known by reading or hearing them, just as any other facts or statements may be known. But the testimony of God concerning Christ is of such a kind, and does so nearly concern our eternal interests, that it were absurd to say we know or believe it if it does not influence or affect us, as, from its very nature, it is fitted to do. We may admit its truth;—we may believe that Christ came into the world, and died for sinners. But has it been a question of real, vital interest with us, whether he died for us,—whether he has borne our iniquities? Have we felt that this question must be settled, if ever we are to know peace of conscience and good hope towards God? Have we seen, or really desired to see, in God's testimony concerning his Son, not only a sure ground to believe that the righteousness of Christ is offered to sinners for their justification before God, but a warrant to take and appropriate that righteousness to ourselves for our own personal justification? And on the strength of that warrant, have we closed with and embraced Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the Gospel, so as to have good hope that we have been brought to know Christ as having borne our iniquities? Many, I fear, have never seriously thought of such an appropriation at all, or ever aimed at the

attainment of any such solid hope or certainty regarding their interest in Christ. And can such persons, then, be said to know him? But even among those who feel that short of such an attainment they cannot find rest, there may be some who are still weary and heavy laden. I would bid all such contemplate the Saviour, as here set forth, speaking of the salvation of sinners as a reward for all that he underwent while he stood in their room, and suffered for their sake; and while they do so, let them ask themselves whether they can doubt his willingness, any more than his power to save. Let them inquire, at the same time, whether there may not be some secret sin or some feeling of self-righteousness that may be preventing them from taking what is freely given to them of God. And, finally, I would urge them to persevere in seeking to know Christ more fully; for they have the gracious assurance that they shall know, if they follow on to know the Lord,—that his going forth is prepared as the morning,—and he shall come unto them as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

In the last verse of the chapter, the subject of Messiah's glorification is continued, Jehovah himself being still represented as speaking: "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong." This language is, of course, figurative, representing Christ as a mighty conqueror. And it is a figure which must have been peculiarly expressive to the people of Israel, who, from the commission which had been given to them, to execute God's judgments on the idolatrous inhabitants of Canaan, were familiar with victories as special manifestations of divine power. And, accordingly, we find the spiritual conquests of Messiah frequently set forth in language applicable to the achievements of mighty and victorious kings. Thus it is said of him in the 45th Psalm, "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee." And, in like manner, in the 110th Psalm, "The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead

bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries." And so he is described here as great among the mighty, and as dividing the spoil with the strong, or, as it may be rendered, dividing the spoil among the strong,—implying that he not only took their possessions as spoil, but subdued and took themselves captive. And in this view of the passage, the great or many, and the strong here spoken of, may be considered as the same with the many nations and the kings spoken of at the close of the preceding chapter, where it is said, "So shall he sprinkle many nations: the kings shall shut their mouths at him,"—that is, be silent before him, in token of submission, and doing him homage: "for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider," or understand.

The passage before us, then, was a prediction of the future triumphs of the Gospel,—of those which it so largely won in the apostolic age, and of those that are yet to be achieved, when, to an extent never yet realised, kings shall be nursing-fathers, and queens nursing-mothers to the Church,—when all nations shall be blessed in Jesus, and men of every nation shall call him blessed. But while Christ's exaltation to sovereign authority and power is thus very plainly and emphatically foretold, yet the prominent subject, even in this last verse, notwithstanding all that had already been said of it, is the ground or reason of his exaltation,—the claim which he had to be thus honoured and glorified: "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made," or shall make, "intercession for the transgressors." There is something peculiarly fitted to arrest our attention in the frequency with which Christ's mediatorial work is introduced, and the length at which it is dwelt upon, as the ground or reason of his exaltation to honour, and glory, and sovereign authority. In the preceding verses of this chapter, as we have already seen, a great deal had been said to keep before the minds of God's people the important, and to them the most interesting truth, that because for their sakes he had suffered and died, therefore he was to be rewarded by their being given to him as his redeemed people, in whose salvation he was to see of the travail of his soul and be

satisfied. His sufferings, moreover, in working out their salvation, had been set forth in such a variety of expression as seemed to exhaust the subject, and to leave nothing more to be said on it: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." And yet, as if nothing had been said of the diversity and intenseness of the Saviour's sufferings, the subject is again introduced in the last verse of the chapter; and these sufferings are set forth in new and equally diversified terms.

He is here represented as having "poured out his soul unto death,"—an expression which is quoted in the New Testament, when the apostle says, "He poured out his soul an offering for sin." It is farther said, that "he was numbered with the transgressors,"—a statement which we find our Lord, as the evangelist Luke records, applying to himself, when, immediately before going to the garden of Gethsemane, he said to his disciples, "This that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors." And the evangelist Mark, when he records that with Jesus they crucified two thieves, the one on his right hand, and the other on his left, adds, "And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors." It is farther said, for the purpose of setting forth the completeness of Christ's mediatorial work, "And he bare the sin of many,"—a statement which is in substance what Christ declared of himself, when he said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." And, finally, there is here brought before us the intercessory work of Christ as Mediator,—that part of his work which he still continues to carry on, and on account of which it is declared of him that he is able to save evermore them that come unto God by him. And he "made intercession for the transgressors." Such is the care which is here, and elsewhere in Scripture, taken to assure us of the Saviour's finished work, his perfect righteousness, his all-suffi-

ciency and power to save. This truth is placed in every possible light, and expressed in every variety of language, as if to prevent the possibility of the most ingenious suggestions of unbelief to call it in question. And then let us remember in what connection and for what purpose it is here introduced. It is to show what a claim or title Christ had to be exalted, and to be crowned with glory and honour. And in what a light does this place the salvation of sinners, as that on account of which God delighteth to honour his Son, giving him a name that is above every name, and placing him at his own right hand, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come! Surely if we believe and ponder what is contained in this short chapter, it can hardly fail to awaken the suspicion, that we have never seen the redemption of our own souls to be so precious as it ought to be with us; nor would it fail, also, to convince us that we have been most lamentably deficient in seeking to be instrumental in the conversion of the souls of others. Christ's reward for all that he did and endured is the salvation of sinners. In that, he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied. Did we then feel as we ought to feel our own personal obligations to him,—did we love him as he deserves to be loved,—were his honour and glory dear to us, as our salvation was dear to him,—how anxious would we be for the extension of his kingdom, the ingathering of his purchased people, and how careful in all things to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light!

XXX.

A PROMISE OF ENLARGEMENT TO THE CHURCH.

ISAIAH LIV. 1-17.

THERE is a very close connection, I think, between this chapter and the preceding. In that chapter,—the 53d,—we have a prediction of Christ, the most remarkable, perhaps, to be found in the Old Testament Scriptures. The condition and circumstances in which he appeared,—the treatment which he experienced at the hand of the Jews,—his sufferings, death, and burial, are foretold with such a fulness as to resemble more the narrative of an eye-witness who lived during the time of Christ's manifestation in the flesh, than a prophecy delivered seven hundred years before the events happened. This prediction of what Christ was to do and endure is followed by a statement of the consequences of his sufferings and death, wherein the doctrine of justification through his blood is as clearly set forth as it is in the New Testament itself,—and set forth, moreover, in such a variety of expression as to show, in a way very affecting, how willing God is to give sinners the assurance that a complete atonement has been made for sin, that the demands of divine justice have been satisfied, and that they who know the Saviour as having thus borne their sins, and as making intercession for them, shall be justified and accepted as righteous before God. And with this full exhibition of Gospel truth, the concluding verses of the chapter contain also a prediction of Gospel triumphs,—of the spread of the truth among men, and of the conversion of multitudes by

the faith of that truth : “ When his soul shall make an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied : by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many ; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong ; because he hath poured out his soul unto death : and he was numbered with the transgressors ; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” All this, it will be remembered, was addressed to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who in the days of Isaiah constituted the visible Church, and of whom a faithful remnant formed the invisible and true Church. And, in like manner, when the prophecy was fulfilled, when Christ actually appeared, and suffered, and died, as the prophet here foretold that he would do, the Jews were still the only visible Church on earth, and among them alone was to be found the true Church,—those, namely, who were waiting for the consolation of Israel,—that is, for the coming of the Saviour who had been promised from the beginning, even the seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent. I do not say that there were at that period no other true believers than Jews ; for there were then, as there had been at all former times, Gentiles who had become proselytes to the Jewish faith,—that is, who had turned from the worship of dumb idols to the service of the living God ; and among such we find some of whom the Lord himself said, “ I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.” Still, the Jews, as a nation, constituted the visible Church, and among them also was to be found the true Church, consisting of all who looked forward in faith to the coming Saviour, or who believed on him when he did come. It was for their comfort and encouragement, then, that the prophet delivered and recorded so many precious promises concerning the coming of Messiah, the accomplishment of his mediatorial undertaking, and the glorious consequences that were to follow. But when the true Israel, those who were really believers, heard or read these promises,—when they were assured that Messiah should see his seed, and prolong his days, and that the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand,—they would naturally

conclude that the blessings thus purchased and promised were to be bestowed mainly, if not exclusively, on the Jews,—that they were to be Messiah's seed, the "many" whom he was to justify by the knowledge of himself,—that, in a word, the Jews, as a people or nation, would still continue to be the Church, not only in name and by profession, but in a purer state than they had ever before been.

Such would naturally be, and such, we cannot doubt, actually were the hopes and expectations which they cherished concerning the blessings, even the spiritual blessings, which Messiah was to bestow; for we know that the disciples themselves, even after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, continued for a time to entertain the opinion that his salvation was to be proclaimed only to Jews, or proselytes to the Jewish religion. Even true believers, then,—those who had right and spiritual views of Messiah's character and work, and of the blessings which he was to procure and bestow,—would conclude that these blessings were to be conferred on the Jewish people; and when the prophet foretold the great increase of Messiah's government, they would interpret the prediction as meaning a great and extensive revival of the true religion among their countrymen,—so extensive as to embrace the nation generally. But this was not to be. There was, indeed, a remnant among them, who were brought to see in Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah promised to the fathers, and to confide in him as the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners. But though they formed a goodly number, they were still but a remnant. The Jews as a nation remained impenitent and unbelieving; and as a nation they were to be cast off. The relation in which they had long stood to God was to be dissolved. They were no longer to occupy the honourable place of his peculiar and covenant people, for whom and by whom he had glorified himself in the sight of the heathen. And if so,—if Israel, in their national capacity, were no longer to be even the visible Church of God,—where was the true Church to be found? From what quarter were those multitudes to come in whose salvation Messiah was to see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied? Such were the misgivings to which the people of God, the true Israel, might give way, and such the desponding question which they might be ready to put, if Israel as a nation or people were

to be cast off. And to this question the prophet replies in the chapter before us, where he assures the Church, for her comfort and consolation, that though the nominal Israel were rejected, yet the spiritual Israel should not only participate in all the blessings which Messiah was to procure, but should be increased in numbers unspeakably beyond all that they had ever been. The consideration here addressed to the Church is, in substance, the same with that from which Messiah himself is represented, in a preceding chapter, as drawing encouragement for the prosecution and accomplishment of his work, notwithstanding of all the ingratitude and unbelief which he was to experience at the hand of the Jews: "Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my works with my God. . . . Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. . . . It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

Such, generally, seems to be the purpose or design of this chapter. It refers to that period of time at which the Jewish economy was to cease, and when the national privileges which that people had so long enjoyed were to be swept away. To the unbelieving Jews,—that is, to the great body of the people,—this was, of course, a most disastrous event, being the overthrow of all that they thought most valuable, and the extinction of hopes which they had most fondly cherished. But even in regard to true believers among them, it was an event that might greatly perplex and depress them. They had never doubted that the economy which had subsisted for so many generations would be permanent,—that the covenant which God had made with their fathers never could be broken,—and that the coming of Messiah, so far from abrogating, was to extend the privileges and augment the glory of the dispensation under which they lived. With that dispensation were associated not only all their ideas of temporal comfort and prosperity, but all their hopes, also, even of spiritual blessings. Though they felt their need of something better than a portion in the land of Canaan, and looked for a heavenly inhe-

ritance to Him who was promised in the prophecies and typified in the ordinances of the Old Testament, yet these promises and types were chiefly connected with their condition as the peculiar people of God, with whom he had condescended to enter into covenant, and to whom, from the day that that covenant was established, all the communications of his will were made. They only of all the nations of the earth had Jehovah for their God; to them, as his covenant people, all his great and precious promises were given; and among them alone were ordinances of divine authority instituted,—ordinances through which the believing worshipper found acceptance with God. And besides all this, it appeared to be essentially necessary that if they were to reap the spiritual benefit of these promises and ordinances, they must continue to enjoy the temporal privileges and prerogatives by which they were distinguished as God's covenant people. When these privileges and prerogatives, then, were swept away,—when the dispensation which they believed was to be permanent came to an end,—and when the covenant which had secured to them the land of Canaan for an inheritance, as God's chosen people, was dissolved,—what were even the true Israel to think? They would, no doubt, recognise, in the rejection of Israel as a nation, the righteous judgment of God executed upon “a disobedient and gainsaying people.” But might they not give way to the desponding thought that they, too, were to be rejected,—that they, too, had ceased to stand to God in the relation in which they once stood to him? God himself had spoken of that relation as a very endearing one; for in reference to Israel, he had called himself their God, their Father, their Husband; as when he said by the mouth of his servant Jeremiah, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord.” When Israel, then, as a nation, were rejected, might not even true believers themselves fear that they, too, were to be cast off,—that they, too, had forfeited and lost all the privileges of that relation in which they once stood to God?

And it is in this state of dejection, not only regarding them-

selves, but regarding the Church also as desolate and forsaken, that they are addressed in the figurative but most encouraging language of this chapter: "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes." The Church felt herself to be desolate, like a widow bereaved and childless; but she is called upon to enlarge the place of her habitation, for the reception of a family more numerous by far than that which she had lost. She had indeed lost Israel, she herself,—I mean the Christian Church at Jerusalem,—being but a remnant of that nation which had been the covenant people of God, but which was cut off not only from being the true Church, but from all share in the privileges even of the visible Church. But instead of them she was to receive from other quarters a family far more numerous than she would have had, even if she had retained the whole nominal Israel, and if none but they had been called to a participation in the blessings of the Messiah's purchase. She is called upon, as we have seen in the 2d verse, to enlarge the boundaries of her habitation; and the reason is given in the 3d verse, "For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited." Compared with the whole nation of Israel, which had once been the Church and people of God, the true Church in Jerusalem, formed by the ministry of the apostles, was a comparatively small, and, in the sight of the world, might be a despised body. But she would soon cease to be so; for from her the Gospel was to go forth, and gather into her, as her children, countless multitudes from the Gentiles, on the right hand and on the left. And, therefore, the prophet encourages her against being depressed or discouraged, because she was no longer invested with the temporal privileges and prerogatives which she enjoyed under the old dispensation: "Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more." The

prophet farther assures her, that though Jehovah had ceased to be, as he once was, the husband of Israel in their national capacity, yet he was still her husband, and was thenceforth to be known, not as the God of Israel only, but also of the Gentiles,—a new assurance that the place in the true Church, left vacant by the apostasy and rejection of Israel, would be more than filled by the great multitude which no man could number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation, and people, who were to become the spiritual seed of Abraham: “For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called.”

The Church was thus encouraged to look to the Gentiles for her increase, with the assurance that her expectations would not be disappointed. Had she looked to Israel alone for her enlargement and her perpetuity, her prospect must have been very dark. By the rejection of the great body of that people, her brethren according to the flesh, who, in common with herself, had been called the people of God, she was left small in number, weak in influence, and liable to be despised, as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit. But the prophet assures her that on this very account she was to be the special object of the divine love, and tenderness, and care: “For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.” When God, in righteous judgment, cast out the Jews as a people from all the privileges of that inheritance which had been secured to them by covenant, but which covenant they brake, the Church, or true Israel, as we have seen, had reason to believe that he was angry with her too, and that she also was to be disinherited and cast off. But the prophet, speaking in the name of Jehovah, assures her that her relation to God as her husband was secured by a new and a better covenant than that which he had made with Israel, when he took them by the hand “to bring them out of the land of Egypt;” and that this new covenant, whereby he became her

God, and she became his people, could no more be altered or disannulled than the earth could again be overflowed with the waters of Noah,—a disaster against which it was secured by the unconditional and unqualified oath of Jehovah: “For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”

Such is the assurance which the prophet was commissioned to give to the people of God, that under the new dispensation there never could be any such rejection of them as there was of Israel, when the old dispensation was abrogated or brought to a close. And having given this assurance, the prophet proceeds, at the 11th verse, to set forth, in figurative and very expressive language, the larger communication of spiritual influence which was to be imparted to the Church under the new dispensation, as compared with what was vouchsafed to her under the old. In this part of the prophecy, the Church is represented under the figure of a city,—a figure very common in the writings of the prophets, where Jerusalem is frequently employed to represent the people of God in their collective capacity as the Church. And the figure was peculiarly appropriate as applied to the Church under the old dispensation. Then the people of God were outwardly and visibly a distinct people from all the other nations of the earth. They dwelt apart, surrounded by a wall, not only of separation, but of defence, which, but for their own backsliding, would have been impregnable to all enemies from without. There they enjoyed in peace, unless when disturbed by their own folly and sin, access to God in the ordinances of his own appointment, and received through these ordinances tokens and assurances of the divine favour; yea, God himself dwelt in the midst of them, over all their glory creating a defence. Well, therefore, might the Psalmist say, “Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great king. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. . . . Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, con-

sider her palaces ; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever : he will be our guide even unto death." If this goodly fabric, then, was to be overthrown,—if the dispensation under which the Church might be aptly compared to a walled city, an impregnable fortress, was to be removed,—what could the Church expect her condition to be but that which is here described,—even the condition of one who is "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted?" But she is here assured that the glory of the new dispensation should far excel that of the old, and that she might still be fitly compared to a city,—a city, too, of surpassing splendour and beauty. Outwardly, indeed, and to the carnal eye, she would not be what she had formerly been, when her spiritual privileges were accompanied with all that was imposing in temporal prosperity and power. But her spiritual privileges would be far more abundant,—the communications of grace to her unspeakably larger ; so that, being adorned with all the beauties of holiness, she would be as a city built of precious stones : "Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, . . . and all thy borders of pleasant stones."

That all this is to be understood spiritually is abundantly obvious. But as if to remove all doubt or misapprehension, the figurative language is explained in the 13th and following verses : "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord ; and great shall be the peace of thy children." This is in substance what we find stated in the 31st chapter of Jeremiah, already referred to, respecting the new covenant which the Lord was to make with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. It was not to be according to the covenant made with their fathers when they came up out of Egypt, which covenant they brake. But this should be the covenant that he would make with the house of Israel : "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts ; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord ; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord : for I will forgive their iniquity, and I

will remember their sin no more." And the consequence of being thus taught of God is here declared to be peace and security: "Great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee." A similar promise is recorded by the prophet in a preceding chapter, in reference also to the new dispensation, when it is said, "Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever."

Of course, we are not to understand the promise as meaning that, under the new dispensation, the Church collectively, or believers individually, were to be placed beyond the reach of trouble, or secured against the assaults of enemies; for Christ himself has warned all his people of the very opposite, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." But the promise does mean that, under the new dispensation, which was to be emphatically the ministration of the Spirit, believers, in regard to their spiritual comfort, peace, and sense of security, were to be independent of and raised above the world, as they were not, and could not be, under the old dispensation. Then their spiritual peace and comfort were closely connected with their liberty of access to the place which God had chosen to put his name there; so that when, by the violence of their enemies, they were cut off from the ordinances of divine appointment, they felt as if they were shut out from the presence of God. Thus David complained of his enemies at the court of Saul, who had stirred up the king against him, "They have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods." But, under the new dispensation, the people of God were to receive so largely of the communications of the Spirit as should put them in possession of peace which the world could not destroy or disturb; and though as individuals, and collectively as the Church, they might be exposed to much enmity and manifold trials, yet he who watches over them, and has under his control and at his disposal the weapons of enemies, as well as the instrumentality of his own servants, would assuredly defeat or overrule, for the ultimate good of his Church, every device

that may be framed against her: "Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me : whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work ; and I have created the waster to destroy." All are my creatures, and therefore absolutely in my power. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn;" or as the apostle expresses it, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth ; who is he that condemneth?" "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord ; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

Such are the great and gracious promises contained in this chapter. To the first Christian Church, the Church in Jerusalem, consisting of the faithful and comparatively small remnant of Israel, these promises must have been exceeding precious. The time at which the new dispensation commenced must have been to them a mysterious and perplexing time, when they saw Messiah rejected, and his great salvation despised by their countrymen at large, and no prospect of any considerable number of them being ever brought to acknowledge him. For a season, they might not, and indeed they did not understand these, and many similar predictions, concerning the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles. But what a flood of light must this very portion of Scripture have shed upon the plans and purposes of God, when, after contending with Peter for going in and eating with Cornelius and his household, and after hearing the apostle rehearse how the Holy Ghost fell upon them, even as upon believing Jews, they "glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." But the promises here recorded were not designed exclusively for any one period. It is obvious, from their very nature, that they are the property of the Christian Church of all times, designed to be a perpetual source of consolation and encouragement to God's people, individually and collectively. What is especially promised is a more abundant outpouring, under the new dispensation, of the Holy Spirit, in his enlightening, quickening, sanctifying, and comforting power; and this is a promise, therefore, in

which every child of God is equally interested, and which every child of God is warranted and encouraged to plead. The promise, moreover, is placed in such a variety of lights as to show that it is seasonable at all times, and in all the various circumstances in which believers can be placed. It is said generally that "they shall be all taught of God," and they are warranted, therefore, to ask new communications of light, that they may grow in the knowledge of Him whom to know is life eternal. It is promised that they shall have peace, and be established in righteousness, and they are encouraged, therefore, to pray that the Spirit of God may fill them with "joy and peace in believing," and that this "peace of God, which passeth all understanding," may so keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus, that they may not be afraid of the world and its enmity. It is promised that every tongue that shall rise against them in judgment they shall condemn; and on the strength of this promise they may plead that the Spirit would so bear witness with their spirits to their being the children of God, that they may be able to meet and answer all accusations, whether of their own conscience or of their great adversary, and to say, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

In seasons of spiritual depression, too, they are encouraged to ask and expect consolation; for God is still the same gracious God as when he said to the Church of old, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." Are these, then, promises the fulfilment of which we frequently and earnestly plead? I do not ask to what extent we may have already experienced the fulfilment of them, though that is a question which we would do well seriously to put to ourselves. But are the blessings here promised so valuable in our estimation,—so necessary for our true well-being here and hereafter,—that we cannot refrain from making them the subject of our daily and earnest prayer? To those who have already tasted and known that the Lord is gracious,

surely nothing more should be necessary than to be told that such blessings are promised,—that the promise is given that it may be pleaded,—and that if pleaded in the exercise of faith in him by whom the blessings have been promised, it will assuredly be fulfilled. Many, I fear, never really believe that such blessings can be obtained, and would not desire them, even if they believed that they could be had for the asking. They would rather be alarmed than pleased with the thought of being so immediately influenced by the Holy Spirit, as it is here promised to believers that they shall be; and instead of thinking it a privilege to live in Gospel times, because of the larger and more abundant communications of the Spirit, they would rather be in circumstances where such spiritual influences are never known or spoken of. To unregenerate men, the work of the Spirit is more offensive than it is incredible. They do not, indeed, believe in it; but the very suspicion that it may be true awakens their fear, and calls forth their enmity. But are believers themselves as anxious as they should be to experience the quickening, enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting power of the Spirit? They may be willing enough to enjoy his presence as the Comforter. But do they always bear in mind that he will never be the Comforter without being also the Sanctifier?—and, surely, if they reflect at all, they must be convinced that they should not wish it otherwise. And if they are as anxious to be sanctified and cleansed from the pollution of sin as they are to be comforted under or delivered from affliction, they will assuredly be heard when they pray for the support and consolation which are here promised; for in such a frame of mind, their desires are in accordance with the divine mind, inasmuch as this is the will of God concerning them, even their sanctification.

And if believers are really anxious to know how far they have experienced this sanctifying and comforting power of the Spirit, there is one test furnished by the passage before us whereby they may try themselves, and which may help them to understand what is the real value which they put upon the blessings here promised. It will be observed that the first consideration here presented to the Church for her consolation and encouragement, and one which is largely dwelt upon, is the assurance, that though the nominal Israel were cast off, as forming no part of the

true Church, yet their place would be more than supplied by multitudes from among the Gentiles, who should be numbered with Messiah's seed, and should participate in all the blessings of his salvation. This, of course, implied that the Church, the people of God, were greatly depressed and discouraged by the thought that there were to be so few who were to share in the blessings which they felt to be so precious to themselves. And so it will be with us, if we have really seen and understood the value of these blessings; and, therefore, it is the symptom of a spiritually healthy frame of mind, if we can derive real satisfaction and delight from the promise of the extension of Christ's kingdom,—such a promise as is here recorded, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand, and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited."

XXXI.

A FULL AND FREE SALVATION PROCLAIMED.

ISAIAH LV. 1-3.

THE prophet in this passage speaks of spiritual blessings,—even the blessings of Christ's salvation,—and the language employed does most emphatically express not only the fulness of these blessings, but the freeness also with which they are offered to every sinner of mankind. That language is figurative, but very expressive. Nor is it peculiar to this passage, being frequently employed elsewhere in Scripture to describe spiritual blessings. "How excellent," says the Psalmist, "is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life; and in thy light shall we see light." "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." In the New Testament, too, we find spiritual blessings set forth under the emblem of water. Thus our Lord said to the woman of Samaria, of whom he had asked water, while he sat weary by the well of Sychar, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and

he would have given thee living water. Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." In these and similar passages which might be quoted, we have the substance of what is said in the passage before us regarding the nature of spiritual blessings. But there is one passage more to which I would especially refer, as containing, if not an express quotation of the words before us, at least a very clear commentary on them, inasmuch as in that passage our Lord has distinctly appropriated them to himself, and has very plainly intimated to us that the prophet here speaks in his name. "In the last day," says the evangelist John, "that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Christ has thus spoken of himself in almost the very words of the verse under consideration, so that if we could suppose the prophet to have actually witnessed what the evangelist describes as taking place in the temple at Jerusalem on the great day of the feast, when Jesus stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," he could not have more distinctly expressed what he witnessed than in the words before us, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." And it is very interesting to observe, that, as if to give us assurance of the permanency of this spring of living water, and of its sufficiency and fulness to satisfy the thirsty of all subsequent times, the invitation is repeated, and stands recorded in the book of Revelation, at the very close of the last communication which the Spirit of God has seen meet to record. At the beginning of the last chapter of that book, we find the apostle saying, "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb;" and towards the close of the same chapter it is said, "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the Churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

From the frequency, then, with which water is employed in Scripture as an emblem of spiritual blessings, we might infer that it is a very appropriate figure, both as it regards the spiritual necessities of men as sinners, and the provision which has been made for supplying these necessities. And how it is so is very clearly and fully explained in the verses before us. It is here said of all men that they thirst; and it is at the same time asserted that the faith of the Gospel alone will ever effectually allay or satisfy their thirst. It is not meant, of course, that men naturally desire or thirst after spiritual blessings, for the very opposite is the truth. But the desire of happiness, of one kind or other, is inherent in every human being. Though that desire is frequently misdirected, seeking its gratification in lying vanities, still it is in ceaseless and active operation, as the variety and ardour of human pursuits do abundantly testify; and until the soul has found a source of enjoyment that is both pure and permanent, its craving after happiness will remain unsatisfied. An invitation, therefore, which is addressed to every one who thirsteth, is in reality addressed to every individual of the children of men. It might perhaps be supposed, indeed, that an invitation so full of encouragement and so rich in consolation as that before us, cannot be intended for the ungodly and worldly-minded; and that its chief design, therefore, must be to dispel the fears of the trembling penitent, and minister comfort to the contrite in heart. To the humble and contrite in spirit it is assuredly very precious, and cannot fail to bring relief and enlargement of heart. But that the invitation is not exclusively intended for such is here very plainly declared; for it is followed up by a most earnest and compassionate remonstrance with those to whom it is addressed, on the folly of seeking in perishing things what can only be found in the blessings of the Gospel: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." It is to men as sinners, then, as estranged from God and holiness, and as wasting their time and their strength in the pursuit of what cannot profit,—it is to men in this condition that the invitation is addressed. It is, in fact, by representing the final disappointment

and misery of that condition, that the value of spiritual blessings is set forth and urged on the attention and acceptance of men. And what language could describe more truly or more strikingly than this remonstrance does the condition of all, whatever be their character, or employments, or pursuits, who are placing their chief good or seeking their satisfying portion in any thing else than in God,—in his favour, which is life, and in his loving-kindness, which is better than life? The objects on which they have set their hearts, and for the attainment of which they mainly expend their thoughts, and time, and strength, may be very different with different individuals. But whatever may be the object which men pursue,—however dignified and useful as compared with the debasing gratifications in which others indulge,—yet, so long as the world holds the chief place in their heart, their state in relation to God is essentially the same; and while in that state there can be no true and permanent peace for them.

And the passage before us appeals to their own conscience and experience for the truth of this. The question, or remonstrance, “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?” is virtually putting it to them whether it is not true that the fairest of their prospects and the most sanguine of their hopes have hitherto failed of being realised,—that after the most successful of their efforts in obtaining what they hoped would make them happy, their comfort has been broken in upon by the ceaseless craving of desires still unsatisfied, a restless longing after some unattained object which they think essential to their happiness,—and that they are thus warned, by the experience of every succeeding day, of the disappointment and vexation of spirit in which all their pursuits must ultimately terminate. And while the remonstrance thus appeals to the experience of men themselves, in confirmation of the truth that the worldly portion which they have chosen has proved unsatisfying, it refers, also, to the efforts which they make, and the labour which they undergo, in the pursuit of what after all is but a lying vanity. It reminds them, as an aggravation of their folly, that they cannot even allege, respecting the worldly object on which they have set their heart, that it is purchased at little expense, or preserved with

little trouble and care. On the contrary, it is daily demanding of them the endurance of much labour, and the sacrifice of much comfort. They are often in a state of the most painful anxiety and suspense about the result of some scheme or speculation in which they have hazarded a great deal, and from which they fondly hope that they are to reap fruits very abundant and very satisfying,—and not unfrequently their state of suspense terminates in the bitterness of utter disappointment. Something like this is, no doubt, the condition of all men, even of God's own people,—for all men are doomed to eat bread in the sweat of their face; and many, very many, even in labouring to provide for themselves and for their house the bare necessities of life, experience disappointment in some of their most lawful and best laid schemes, and that, too, after experiencing much anxiety, and undergoing great toil and labour. But then, in regard to God's people, however painful their disappointments may be, these disappointments are not the ruin of all their happiness and their hopes. They have a treasure laid up, “where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.” They may undergo much fatigue, and endure many privations, and may, after all, fail in the attainment of the object for which they laboured. But that object is not their all. There is a better part which they have chosen,—a portion which they have longed for more earnestly, and laboured for more diligently, than ever they did for worldly things, and which worldly disappointments often render, and ought always to render more precious to them. But how different the condition of those who have never sought for nor seriously desired any such portion! They have nothing to compensate for their worldly disappointments but the pursuit of some new object, which may itself end in disappointment. They spend their time, and exhaust their strength, bodily and mental, for that which may never be attained, and which, even when attained, leaves the soul as destitute as ever of all that is essential to its eternal well-being. At the very best, they “labour in the very fire,” and “weary themselves for very vanity.”

Such is the representation which Scripture gives of the condition of all who are seeking their chief happiness, their satisfying portion, in something else than God; and however diversified the

character and pursuits of such men may be, or however varied their success in the prosecution of their schemes, their condition is essentially the same. They are without God, and without hope in the world, and must, therefore, be strangers to true peace and happiness. There may be some, perhaps, who will not admit that they have been spending their "money for that which is not bread," and their "labour for that which satisfieth not." In their worldly pursuits, their successes may have been so many, and their disappointments so few, that they have experienced scarcely any thing of that dissatisfaction which is here represented as attaching to every earthly thing. And though they may not be able to say that every event in their lives, and every circumstance in their condition, has turned out precisely as they hoped and wished, yet they may be disposed to allege that, with very few abatements, the world has yielded them, both in kind and in degree, all the enjoyment which they care for or desire. But granting that all this were true,—granting that, in point of enjoyment, every succeeding day has been as the former, and even much more abundant,—and that in taking a survey of their past history and present condition, they find scarcely any thing that they could wish to have been materially different from what it has been ; yet if, amidst all the schemes of happiness which they have formed, the enjoyment of God has not occupied the first place, or, perhaps, any distinct place at all,—if, in their varied pursuits, they have had little time, and as little inclination, seriously to inquire how they stand in relation to God, and how they are prepared to appear at his judgment-seat, and to enter on the eternity that is to follow,—and if, with their growing worldly success and comfort, they have never felt it a matter of deep concern whether they are growing in resemblance to Christ, and in meetness for being happy with him for ever,—then what can be the termination of all such gratifications but vanity and vexation of spirit ? and what is the satisfaction which they are deriving from them, but a melancholy proof that they are thereby becoming less alive to their need of a better portion, and less capable of relishing and enjoying spiritual things ?

They may allege, indeed, that this satisfaction is nothing more than a cheerful contentment with the lot which the providence of God has assigned them ; and that such contentment is an

expression of gratitude which cannot fail to be well-pleasing in his sight. And, certainly, a contented submission to the divine will, and a grateful acknowledgment of the divine bounty, is a portion of the homage which is due to the Father of mercies, and can never fail to find a place in the heart of every devout believer. But the grateful enjoyment of the good things of this life, as the kind accommodation which a bountiful Father has provided for his children in this their pilgrimage,—their journey through the wilderness,—is one thing; but a very different thing is that attachment to worldly enjoyments, for their own sake, which serves in a great measure to shut God and eternity out of the thoughts. And thus, the contentment of men with their condition may be only a proof of their estrangement from God, and of their incapacity for the enjoyment of what is spiritual and permanent. If, in the forbearance of God, and by the bounty of his providence, their disappointments have been so few, and their success so great, as to leave them little to wish for,—and if they are so fully satisfied with the abundance of their worldly comforts, as scarcely, if at all, to feel their need of spiritual blessings,—then, humanly speaking, they are in a more hopeless condition than even those who are contending with successive disappointments, seeking in some new worldly object compensation for the loss of a former; and however long they may be permitted to enjoy, without interruption, what they think a satisfying portion, they will sooner or later find, in their bitter experience, that they have spent their “money for that which is not bread,” and their “labour for that which satisfieth not.”

It is, then, in opposition to, or in contrast with, these lying vanities in which men seek their chief good, but which can only deceive and disappoint them, that the blessings of salvation are here set forth as the only satisfying portion of the soul. And the contrast is twofold,—first, in regard to the fulness or satisfying nature of that portion; and, second, in respect of the freeness with which it is offered to all. And in reference to both, the language employed is varied and very expressive. Water, milk, and wine, as has been well observed, are here combined to express the ideas of refreshment, nourishment, and exhilaration; and under these figures are included all things essential to the spiritual life. To the soul that is thirsting after happi-

ness, the best of earthly gratifications can afford only a partial and temporary alleviation of its thirst,—leaving it at last more thirsty than before. But the provision here made for satisfying all those desires of the soul which are essential to its happiness is as permanent as it is full. The water to which men are here urged to betake themselves will not only allay,—it will satisfy their thirst; for it is living water, ever flowing, but ever full. The milk and the wine of which they are invited to partake will never lose their virtue to nourish and to invigorate. They who are persuaded to come to the feast which has been prepared, will find that they do indeed eat that which is good, and that their soul is delighting itself in fatness.

And if the portion thus provided stands in striking contrast, in regard to its full and satisfying nature, with every thing that men naturally choose for their portion, the contrast is not less striking in respect of the terms on which it may be obtained. A worldly portion,—uncertain as it is in its attainment, insecure in its possession, and, at the best, but transitory,—can only be acquired, if acquired at all, with toil and sore travail; such toil and travail as often renders the possessor incapable of enjoying it during the few years that remain to him when his labour is over. But the full and enduring portion here held out is offered to all as a free gift; and the freeness is expressed in very emphatic terms: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money.” This was obviously anticipating a difficulty or objection which it was foreseen men would be ready to start,—namely, that it was vain for them to apply to this well of living water, seeing they had nothing wherewith to purchase it. And it is a difficulty which, I believe, all are disposed to entertain, if they do not express it, and one by which many have been long hindered from drinking and being refreshed. It is here, therefore, most graciously anticipated and answered; as if it were said, Let it be no objection to your coming, and no hindrance to your partaking of the bread and water of life, that you have nothing wherewith to purchase: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money.” And then, as if to arrest attention, and more emphatically to express the gratuitous nature of the blessings offered, men are invited to buy, though they have no money. The expression

may seem a singular one, as implying something like a contradiction. But it is very full of meaning. It is designed, I think, to assure men that they may come to receive the offered blessings as unhesitatingly as if they had wherewithal to purchase them, and that, having accepted them, they may appropriate and enjoy them as fully as if they had actually bought them : "Come ye, buy, and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

The general import of the figurative language here employed will be readily perceived by every one who is at all acquainted with Scripture. At the same time, there may be a vague notion that the language is designed generally to describe spiritual blessings, and to explain how these are to be obtained, while there is no such distinct knowledge of its meaning as to be practically useful. It may not be unimportant, therefore, or unnecessary, to inquire what it is that we are precisely and definitely to understand by coming "to the waters," and buying "wine and milk without money and without price." And to this question the passage itself furnishes a very explicit answer ; for it goes on, in the 2d and 3d verses, to state, in plain language, what is figuratively expressed in the first verse : "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me : hear, and your soul shall live ; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." To come to the waters, then, to buy and eat, to buy wine and milk without money and without price, is just a figurative form of expression for hearing, believing, and cordially acquiescing in the proposals of the Gospel. And what does the Gospel propose to sinners ? It addresses them as fallen, guilty, and condemned creatures, lying under the wrath and curse of God, each of them alike unable either to save himself, or by any means to redeem his brother ; and it tells them that God himself has found a ransom for them, even his own Son, who undertook to be their surety for satisfying the demands of divine justice in their stead, and who, for the accomplishment of his undertaking, assumed their nature, stood in their room, endured the wrath of God which they had incurred, bare their sins in his own body on the tree, and suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring them

unto God. It tells them, farther, that, in virtue of what Christ has done and endured, repentance and the remission of sins is freely proclaimed to all,—that eternal life is offered to every sinner, as the gift of God through Jesus Christ,—that every sinner is invited, yea, entreated, and commanded to believe, and in his heart cordially to close with this proposal, so as to receive and rest upon Christ for salvation,—and that whosoever so believes on him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life.

This is the sum and substance of the Gospel, when stated in literal language, and without a figure. And why, then, is it stated, here and elsewhere, frequently, in figurative language? For a very obvious purpose. The figures employed on such occasions, as, for example, in the passage before us, describe in a very intelligible and lively manner the effects which the Gospel, in some measure or degree, will and must produce on all who believe it. Were men fully alive to the guilt, and misery, and helplessness of their condition as sinners,—and were they convinced that to be restored again to the favour and fellowship of God, which they have forfeited and lost, is to be restored to true happiness,—then the Gospel would be to them glad tidings of great joy; and when heard, and understood, and believed, it would be to their soul what water, and wine, and milk, are to the weary and worn out body. And it is of unspeakable importance to have such views of the effects, as well as of the nature of the Gospel presented to us; for when we are told the simple truth, that whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life, we are greatly in danger of hastily concluding that we believe, and therefore are safe. Outwardly we have heard much of the Gospel, even all our life long; we may allege, too, that we have often inclined our ear, and hearkened diligently to its truths and its promises; and we may flatter ourselves, therefore, that if this be all that is required for our participating in the blessings of Christ's salvation, then our interest in these blessings is secured. But with all this, we may never have so hearkened, so inclined our ear, or so heard the gracious voice of the Saviour, as that our souls do live. It is in great kindness, therefore, that here, as well as in many other passages of Scripture, the effects of the Gospel, when really believed, are so intelligibly and fully set forth as to furnish a test whereby we may try our-

selves, and ascertain whether we truly and savingly believe. Every one who is acquainted with the Bible must know that the figurative portion of this chapter is but one of many similar statements, setting forth the joy and peace which flow from believing,—the rest and refreshment which that soul experiences which has been brought to rely on the righteousness and all-sufficiency of Christ,—the pacifying influence of his blood in soothing the fears of a guilty conscience,—and the communications of light, and life, and spiritual comfort, which are from time to time received through the exercise of faith in the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel. Our Lord himself taught in the same manner as we find the prophet teaching. He represented himself figuratively as the bread of life, saying, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven ; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever ; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. . . . Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life.” And this figurative language he explained, when he said, “I am the bread of life : he that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. . . . It is the Spirit that quickeneth ; the flesh profiteth nothing ; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” When we profess, then, to believe the Gospel, let us ask ourselves, whether the truths which it teaches, the discoveries of the divine character which it makes, and the precious promises which it gives, have been to us, in any measure or degree, as water to the thirsty, or as wine and milk to the faint and the weary,—whether we have so hearkened, so inclined our ear, and so heard, as that our souls do live.

There are very many, I fear, who professedly believe in Christ, but who could not honestly say that the Gospel has ever been to them what it is here and elsewhere declared to be to all who truly believe. They have never really thirsted for spiritual blessings, and, therefore, have never in earnest applied to the fountain of living water. And even in regard to those who do really believe, it may be a subject of lamentation with them, that through the prevalence of worldly affections and unbelief, they have not tasted so largely as they might have done of the refreshment and consolation which have been so richly provided

for them. Still, with all such, it must in some measure be a matter of experience, that the Gospel really is what it is here declared to be. No man who has ever been under deep heart-felt anxiety about his spiritual state and his prospects for eternity, can have failed to perceive how truly his condition is here represented, as that of thirst and weariness. From the moment that he began to be haunted with a suspicion that all was not right with the concerns of his soul, he would begin to feel that he wanted something which was essential to his peace. Whatever his worldly condition might be, if he could not throw off the suspicion, he would be restless and disquieted. The most valuable of his enjoyments would cease to yield him the gratification which they once did, and he would begin to suspect that he was indeed spending his "money for that which is not bread," and his "labour for that which satisfieth not." He might at times attempt, indeed, what most, perhaps, under the first convictions of sin, have attempted,—namely, to suppress his fears by some considerations of his own virtuous character on the one hand, and of the mercy of God on the other; and for a season he might succeed in quieting his apprehensions. But the mercy of God was manifested towards him in his not being permitted to deceive himself with this false peace. And the man who has been thus graciously dealt with, and was not left at rest until he was fully awakened to a sense of his spiritual destitution, will readily acknowledge, that when so awakened, every refuge to which he had formerly betaken himself was indeed a refuge of lies. The more seriously that he reflected on his condition, and on the relation in which he stood to God, the more deeply was he convinced that no amount of worldly possessions could yield him a satisfying portion. Though, from a sense of his guiltiness, he might still be afraid to think of the holiness of the divine character and the rigour of the divine law, yet he felt convinced, at the same time, that nothing less than the favour of God, even of him whom he had so much reason to dread, could pacify his conscience and dispel his fears. And he felt, moreover, that nothing short of such a reconciliation to God as would enable him to come into the divine presence with filial confidence and affection, could ever satisfy the desires which the world had in vain attempted to satisfy.

The man who has thus felt his spiritual destitution can be at no loss to understand what is meant by the thirst of the soul. And of all the vain efforts which he made to satisfy this thirst, before coming to the fountain of living water, he will acknowledge that it was even "as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth ; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty : or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh ; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite." But when he discovers, in the free grace of the Gospel, the true ground of a sinner's hope ; when he reads and understands the unqualified invitation which Christ himself has there addressed to the weary and heavy laden ; when he clearly sees that reconciliation for iniquity, which he could not make for himself, has already been made for him by a surety and representative ; when he discovers, in the blessings of Christ's salvation, ample provision made for all his spiritual necessities ; and when he is enabled to receive and rest upon the Saviour, as he is offered to him in the Gospel,—then he has a full experimental knowledge of the figurative language employed in these verses. He feels that the glad tidings of the Gospel, even the proclamation of a full and free salvation through an Almighty Saviour, has indeed laid open to him the fountain of living waters ; and while, in the exercise of faith, his spirit finds refreshment in its blessed truths, he experiences the fulfilment of the Saviour's gracious promise, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

XXXII.

CHRIST THE FAITHFUL WITNESS.

ISAIAH LV. 4, 5.

IT is very evident that Christ is the person here spoken of. In the preceding verse David is made mention of; and his sure mercies,—that is, the mercies surely promised to him,—are declared to be secured to all who should incline their ear and hear, that is, who should believe and embrace the glad tidings which the prophet announced. These sure mercies of David are the mercies which Christ has obtained the right and the power of dispensing; for the apostle, in his address to the Jews at Antioch, as recorded in the 13th chapter of the Acts, quotes the promise as having been fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ, whereby he became the dispenser to his Church and people of the blessings promised to David. Though the mercies here spoken of, therefore, were originally promised to David, they were in reality to be procured by and placed at the disposal of David's son, even Messiah, in virtue of the everlasting covenant whereby he undertook to be the substitute and surety of as many as should believe on him. But besides all this, there is ground, I think, to believe that the name "David" in the preceding context, is to be understood as meaning, not directly and in the first instance David, and then indirectly Messiah as his son or descendant according to the flesh, but Messiah himself. In confirmation of this opinion, I might refer to various passages in the writings of the prophets where Christ is plainly foretold under the name of David, inas-

much as blessings more numerous and more valuable than had ever been previously enjoyed were promised to Israel and Judah in the person and under the reign of David, hundreds of years after David had been gathered to his fathers. Thus the prophet Hosea, referring to the "many days" during which the children of Israel were to abide "without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim," says, "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." So the prophet Jeremiah, at a much later date, says, referring to the enemies of the Church, "It shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: but they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them." And Ezekiel, too, at a period still later, thus prophesies in the name of the Lord, "Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it."

All these predictions and promises, even the earliest of them, were delivered hundreds of years after David's death, and could refer, therefore, to none but Messiah. But on no occasion could the name David be more appropriately applied to Messiah than on that before us. The preceding context contains the substance of the Gospel; for while the blessings there held out do immeasurably surpass in value any temporal inheritance, they are described in the very language in which the New Testament writers have exhibited the blessings of Christ's salvation. The prophet begins by directing the thirsty soul to the only fountain where spiritual refreshment is to be found. He invites all, without exception, freely and fully to partake of the living waters which issue from that fountain. He affectionately entreats sinners to abandon the pursuit of what can only terminate in vanity and vexation of spirit. And he assures them, that if

they will but hearken diligently unto Him who has provided this spiritual nourishment, they shall eat "that which is good," and their soul shall "delight itself in fatness;" that if they will incline their ear and come unto him, his words will be spirit and life unto them; that if they will but hear, their souls shall live. Every one who is familiar with the New Testament will readily perceive that these are almost the very terms in which the blessed fruits of faith in the Redeemer are there set forth. Whether, therefore, we consider the inexhaustible fulness of the blessings here described, or the unqualified freeness with which they are offered to every sinner, we cannot fail to perceive that it is the Gospel which the prophet preaches in the preceding context; and it is equally clear that he is speaking of Christ in the words before us, when he describes the author of all these blessings, and represents him as given "for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people."

Assuming, then, that Messiah is the person spoken of, let us inquire into the import of the expressions by which his character and office are here described: "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people." And I would observe, that the title which is in these words applied to Christ, is the same that we find repeatedly given to him in the New Testament. "To this end," said our Lord himself when he stood arraigned at the tribunal of Pilate, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." In the first chapter of the book of Revelation, Christ is called "The faithful witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth." And in a subsequent part of the same book, we find the apostle thus introducing the message which he had been commissioned to deliver to the Church at Laodicea: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness." The expression, then, as a title applied to Christ, is not peculiar to the passage before us. But keeping in view what is stated in the preceding context, we shall find that the import, as well as the appropriateness of the title, is very fully and clearly brought out in this passage,—more so, perhaps, than in any other. When we bear in mind what the blessings are which the prophet sets forth in the first three verses, and the manner in which men

are there represented as becoming partakers of them, we shall see a peculiar force in the title which is here and elsewhere given to Christ, when he is represented as a witness to the people. These blessings are spiritual,—even the blessings of Christ's salvation; and it is said that they are imparted to men, or that men become partakers of them, by the communication of truth, or the proclamation of the Gospel,—even the good news of a full and free salvation. This truth, when clearly perceived and cordially embraced, proves spirit and life to the soul. It soothes the disquietude of men, which, in spite of all their efforts, was till then perpetually disturbing their peace. It opens up to them a source of enjoyment sufficient for the full gratification of their most enlarged desires. It furnishes that rest to their soul which they had wearied themselves in vain to find amidst the endless variety of worldly pleasures and pursuits. These are the effects which are ascribed to the knowledge and belief of the truth. And, accordingly, the prophet, speaking in the name of God, after setting forth the blessings of salvation by every form of expression that could convey an idea of their value and abundance, places before men the free offer of them all, in the simple but emphatic declaration, "Hear, and your soul shall live." And if such be the nature of the blessings which are here earnestly pressed on the acceptance of men, in exchange for the lying vanities which they so eagerly pursue; if these blessings come to their souls through the knowledge and belief of the truth,—that truth which brings glad tidings of great joy; and if the soul is to be soothed, and refreshed, and blessed, just in proportion as the truth is understood and believed;—then by what title can the Author of these blessings, as thus set forth, be more appropriately characterised than that of a witness? In what way could his office be more emphatically described than by representing him as communicating or revealing that truth which the Spirit employs to quicken, with the principle of a divine life, the soul that was formerly dead in trespasses and sins? And what higher security can men have for the faithfulness of this witness than his being given of God, set apart and anointed to preach glad tidings to the meek, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord?

To the believer, no lengthened illustration can be necessary

to show him the force and propriety of the expression here applied to Christ,—an expression which may well awaken a lively apprehension of all that is valuable in his present peace, and of all that is consoling in his future prospects. If he has found an answer, and a satisfactory answer, to the awful question, “What must I do to be saved?”—if he knows and believes that an atonement has been made for sin, so efficacious that he can rely on it for the pardon of his sins,—if he can draw near to God with confidence, feeling that he has a sure ground whereon to stand in the divine presence, and plead for mercy to pardon, and grace to help him in the time of need,—if he knows, and rejoices to believe that God is the God of grace and of salvation,—and if pardon and eternal life, which were to him at one time words almost without a meaning, are now become to him great and most precious realities;—then he must be conscious that for all this he is indebted to Christ as a witness,—a witness unto the truth,—the revealer of the Father and of the Father’s will, for the salvation of sinners. He must be conscious, moreover, that the more he ponders and prays over these blessed truths, the more precious are the discoveries which they make to him of the character of God, and of the unsearchable riches of his redeeming grace and love. He feels that Christ is to him the only witness of these most blessed and consoling truths. None other could have revealed or made them known to him; and on no other authority but Christ’s could he believe and rely on them. It is a matter of every-day experience with him, that the more firmly he can confide on Christ’s witness-bearing,—that is, on what Christ came to reveal of the way of salvation through his own blood,—the more abundantly does he partake of everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. He feels that on the word of Christ is suspended his eternal all,—that if this word be true, he has an anchor of the soul which never can fail him, be the storms and tempests of this life what they may,—and that if it could prove false, or if he should come to think it false, and so disbelieve it, then, at the moment he abandons it as no longer trustworthy, he must make shipwreck of every hope that is dear to him in the prospect of eternity. It is thus that the believer must feel in regard to the word or witness-bearing of Christ. There is absolutely nothing but that

word between him and eternal ruin. Among the various titles, then, which are given to Christ in Scripture, that by which he is represented as "a witness" must to all God's people be very appropriate and full of meaning. It can never cease to be to them a very precious truth, and very rich in consolation, that he is "the Amen, the faithful and true witness,"—speaking the words which no other man ever spake,—and so speaking to their souls that they are constrained to say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

It thus appears that the title "witness" here given to Christ is a very appropriate one, and, moreover, that it inculcates a most important practical lesson,—even the necessity of believers habitually studying his Word, and being daily familiar with the revelation which he has made as the great prophet of his Church, if they would grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Him whom to know is life eternal. But not less appropriate or full of meaning are the other titles here given to Christ, when he is called the "leader and commander" of his people. And of these I may remark, as of the former, that they are the same names or titles that we find applied to him in the New Testament. In the Gospel by John, we find our Lord appropriating to himself the title of leader, when he calls himself the good Shepherd, in whose fold his sheep repose in safety, and under whose guidance they go out and in, and find pasture. As a commander, too, or an almighty ruler, he is also spoken of in the New Testament, when the apostle, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, says that Christ has been exalted "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion," and that to him it has been given to be "head over all things to the Church." And in regard to both titles, he is represented, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as the beginner and finisher of his people's faith, to whom they are required to look,—as the great Shepherd of the sheep, whose resurrection from the dead is a pledge that he has reconciled his people unto God by the blood of the everlasting covenant,—and as the Captain of their salvation, who, in bringing many sons unto glory, was made perfect through suffering. And it is very obvious that they to whom Christ has been given as a witness stand equally

in need of him as a leader and a commander. Without the daily direction of his Word, pointing out to them the way of duty, and the continued communications of his grace by the Spirit to strengthen and support them, they would be in danger every hour, through their own inherent sinfulness, and the infectious influence of abounding iniquity, of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. The representation which is given of sinners in the preceding context obviously implies that their natural state is a state of servitude, as well as of ignorance; that they are not only labouring under a fatal delusion with respect to what true happiness is, but are in love with the very error that deludes them; and that so various are the ills of life by which they are beset, that, after all their efforts in the pursuit of enjoyment, they have really been labouring to make themselves unhappy. Though, by the knowledge and belief of the truth, therefore, they have been undeceived as to what constitutes their true happiness, and have been persuaded to seek their satisfying portion in God, as their Father in Christ Jesus, yet the present life will still be a state of temptation and trial to them. Where sin prevails to such an extent, and in such a variety of forms, sorrow also must necessarily abound. Disappointment in worldly hopes and expectations may be less deeply felt where the consolations of the Gospel are enjoyed; but it may not less frequently occur. And the sinful tendency of the heart, though it may not lead believers captive, as it once did, may nevertheless have power enough to lead them so far astray as to disturb their comfort. To provide, therefore, against these evils, it is necessary not only that they have a faithful witness, on whose word they can rely for the reality of the blessings which he has purchased for and promised to them; but a leader also, and a commander,—one whose authority they feel to be supreme, and whose power they know to be almighty,—and one, therefore, under whose guidance and support they can confidently reckon on a final victory.

And here, as in the former case, I may appeal to the believer's own experience for the truth of these remarks. Though he has known the grace of God in truth, and tasted of joy and peace in believing, yet he must be conscious that there is a tendency in his heart towards earthliness which it requires a strength beyond his own to resist and counteract. He must be

sensible that he is still prone to attach to worldly comforts a value and an importance ill befitting the man who is heir of an eternal inheritance. He must recollect many occasions on which the maxims of the world or the hopes of worldly advantage have influenced him in matters where the authority of Christ ought to have been paramount. And he must have felt that in all such cases he was belying his profession, forfeiting his spiritual comfort, and suffering himself to be again entangled in the yoke of bondage. And to what does he owe it that the world has not again acquired the mastery over him? Why is it that his forgetfulness of the truth has not already ended in his utter apostasy from it? In what way was he arrested in his progress towards spiritual death, to which he was thus returning? By what means was provision made for again putting him in remembrance of the things which he had let slip? And who was it that gave to the word that power and energy by which his soul was again quickened and restored? It is to the supremacy and faithfulness of Him who has been given as "a leader and a commander to the people," that the believer owes all this; and he will acknowledge, that if the truth which has been revealed by the faithful and the true witness is the ground of all his hope, and the well-spring of all his consolations, it is for this, among other reasons, that, under the guidance of a divine leader and commander, he has the assurance of a final victory, and that, knowing whom he has believed, he is "persuaded that he is able to keep that which he has committed to him against that day."

To the truth of these remarks, every believer will, I doubt not, bear witness; for they express what he has in some measure or degree actually experienced. And, to a certain extent, the statement now made will perhaps be acquiesced in even by those who have not really felt the power of the truth. Such persons may admit respecting Christ that he has revealed, in his own teaching and by the mouth of his holy prophets and apostles, more sublime truths concerning the character and government of God, and has prescribed a system of purer moral precepts for the regulation of human conduct, than ever were before promulgated. With the exception, indeed, of such as have never been persuaded that the Scriptures are any thing

more than a cunningly devised fable, there is nobody who will venture to deny that the gospel has revealed what is nowhere else to be found,—that if life and immortality have not been brought to light there, they remain still to be discovered,—and that if the precepts which it contains are not sufficient to promote the growth of virtuous sentiment and the practice of moral duty among mankind, nothing in the form of authoritative commands will ever have power enough to do so. Nay, among professing Christians, there are probably few that would not be ready to go farther than this, and to acknowledge that they consider it one of the most valuable blessings which God in his mercy has bestowed upon them, that he has cast their lot in a Christian country, where they have acquired views of God, and have imbibed sentiments of moral obligation, much purer and more elevated than have ever been found to prevail among those who have never enjoyed a divine revelation.

And with such a general tribute to the character of Christ as a spiritual teacher, we might be ready to conclude that among us at least he has indeed become “a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.” But is there no reason to fear that such general acknowledgments may be made even on the part of those who have no right apprehension of the Saviour’s character, as he is here set forth, and who are deriving no real spiritual advantage from the execution of his offices? May not the enlightened views which the Gospel has opened up, on every subject of a religious and moral nature, be speculated on, and even boasted of, while its truths have never made any saving impression on the heart? And may not the doctrines of the Gospel be held as mere matters of opinion by many who see nothing precious in the doctrines themselves, but think it sufficient that they know and acknowledge them, just as they know many other truths of which they would be ashamed to be ignorant? May they not be contenting themselves with the thought, that the truths which they know, and the opinions which they entertain on the subject of religion, are unspeakably more rational and enlightened than the superstitions of former times, or of other countries in their own time, though the Gospel meanwhile does not in reality yield them any comfort or happiness? May they not, on the ground of such a knowledge, contrive to persuade

themselves that they are living in the faith of the Gospel? And may they not be ascribing to the direct influence of its truths that correctness of moral conduct to which they have been trained and disciplined by the general tone of manners in the society to which they belong? But surely they must perceive, if they would but reflect for a moment, that something more than this was designed to be imparted by Christ when he was given to be "a witness;" for if the truth which he has revealed brings with it no greater enjoyment than they have derived from it, then what becomes of the invitations and promises held forth in the preceding context: "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David?" They must surely admit, that if there be any meaning in such declarations, then there is something unspeakably more valuable in the Gospel than they have yet seen, and something far more devoted in the believer's obedience than they have ever aimed at. They may, indeed, contrive to persuade themselves, that though hitherto the Gospel has not sensibly contributed to their happiness, yet it is in reserve for them hereafter to reap the blessed fruits of their faith in Christ; and that when admitted into the presence of God, they will find that before his face is fulness of joy, and at his right hand pleasures for evermore. But do they never reflect, that if they are to be truly blessed hereafter, in the contemplation of the divine perfections, in a sense of God's presence, and in the enjoyment of communion with him, then, in so far as these things can be now understood and enjoyed, they must yield the same happiness here that they do hereafter? Is it not the testimony of Scripture that there is a joy and peace in believing, even the peace of God that passeth understanding,—a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory? Is it not the very design of the passage before us to represent the Gospel as putting the believer in possession of a better and a more enduring substance than the world can furnish? And so long, therefore, as men are contented with a portion to which the Gospel does not directly or in any sensible degree contribute, have they not reason to suspect that they have never yet understood the character and office of Christ as here set forth, when

it is said of him that he has been given "for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people?"

In these remarks, I have considered the account here given of the person and character of Christ as connected with the preceding invitations, and as calculated to strengthen the believer's confidence in the faithfulness of the promises with which these invitations are accompanied. It appears, however, from the 5th verse, that there is a special reference here to the extension of Christ's kingdom, in the call and conversion of Gentile nations. In that verse Messiah is addressed, and a prophetic description is given of the triumphs of his cause, when, in his glorified state as Mediator, the heathen should be given him for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession: "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not; and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee." This prediction was especially solemn and seasonable, as addressed to Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of the prophet, and was fitted to give peculiar force to the remonstrance which had just been addressed to them. They had but too much reason to regard that prediction as a prediction of judgment,—an intimation that the time would come when the privileges which they had so long enjoyed, but had been so prone to abuse, would be transferred to others, and when the Messiah should find among the despised Gentiles that willing and obedient people which he was not to find in the Jews. But the prediction ought to be alike interesting and instructive to us. When it is said of Christ that he has been given "for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people," and when to this is added an express promise, that he should call a nation which he knew not,—that is, had not previously acknowledged,—and that nations which knew not him should run unto him, it is to us a very distinct intimation of the will of God, that the name of Christ should be known in all the earth, and his saving health among all nations. And if we really believe it to be his will, can we resist the obligation thereby laid upon us to see that, in as far as we are concerned, this gracious purpose be carried into effect? Nay, might it not be expected, that if we ourselves know Christ, we would rejoice in believing that we are permitted to have any part in

the accomplishment of such an object? The prediction has already, indeed, been largely fulfilled in the marvellous spread of the Gospel in apostolic times, and we are ourselves reaping the fruits of that fulfilment. But enough still remains to afford us abundant opportunities of enjoying the privilege and discharging the duty of contributing to the spread of Gospel light among those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. The purpose of God will not fail. He has said that Messiah shall be "a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people,"—that he shall call a nation which he did not before acknowledge,—and that nations which knew him not shall run unto him; and this promise will be made good. But let us bear in mind how the work has been begun, and in what way we have reason to expect that it will be carried on. From the establishment of the first Christian Church among the Gentiles till the present day, the reading and preaching of the Word have been the great instruments by which the work of conversion has been effected; and we are taught, both by Scripture and experience, to believe that these instruments are not to be dispensed with. As often, then, as we have the opportunity and the means of contributing to the more extended circulation of divine truth, the simple question is proposed to us, whether we really and anxiously desire that Christ should be given for a witness to the people. And can there be any hesitation about practically replying to this question, in the minds of those who know, in their own happy experience, that he is indeed "the faithful and true witness?"

XXXIII.

THE FINAL RESTORATION OF THE JEWS

ISAIAH LV. 12, 13.

IN the verses immediately preceding the passage we are about to consider, the prophet foretells, and illustrates by a very expressive figure, the efficacy which was to accompany the word of God: "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." And viewing this prediction in connection with what goes before, we are led to conclude that by the word which goeth forth out of the mouth of the Lord is especially to be understood the Gospel, even the glad tidings of a free salvation, which we find the prophet setting forth, in the first verses of this chapter, in language as plain as that which Christ and his apostles themselves afterwards employed: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;

and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." It is this precious truth, the proclamation of pardon and eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ, that the Scriptures represent as the means whereby the Spirit of God pacifies the conscience and purifies the heart. It occupies, therefore, the same place in the moral world that the rain of heaven does in the natural; and its blessed effects, where it is believed and practically felt, may be most appropriately set forth in the words of the passage before us, "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Such appears to be the general import of the passage under consideration; and it is obvious, I think, that the prediction which it contains was spoken with a special reference to the prophet's own countrymen, and in their national or collective capacity. It is, no doubt, true, that the blessed effects of the Gospel, when it is cordially embraced, are substantially the same, whether the subjects of its comforting and sanctifying influence be Jews or Gentiles; and in this very chapter there is a prediction of other nations being brought under the spiritual government of Christ, and made partakers of all the blessings of his salvation. But it appears, from the manner in which the passage before us is introduced, that the conversion of the Jews is especially meant; and if so, then it refers to events in the history of that people which have not yet taken place. By some, indeed, the passage has been understood as referring, at least in the first instance, to the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, when a great change took place in their moral and spiritual character, as well as in their outward circumstances; and while this idea is not at all inconsistent with the passage before us having an ulterior view to the spiritual restoration of Israel, in their conversion to the faith of the Gospel, there is a great deal in the passage which will certainly admit of being applied to their deliverance from the bondage of a temporal yoke. The promise, "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace,"

is itself expressive of what ransomed captives might be supposed to feel on taking their departure from the land of their bondage. It is the language in which the return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem is frequently foretold in the writings of the prophets. And it is a promise which agrees with the recorded history of that event, and of the manner in which it was brought about, when, instead of being required to make any laborious effort or to maintain a painful conflict for the recovery of their liberty, they were sent away in peace by the express permission and under the immediate protection of the sovereign to whom they had been in subjection.

In that event, too, there was a fulfilment, to a certain extent, of the prediction contained in the preceding verses, not only as it respected the faithfulness of the divine promises, but as it regarded the efficacy of the word that goeth forth out of the mouth of the Lord; for whatever might be the extent to which Cyrus was acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures, or whatever might be the means by which he acquired his information, it is evident, from that monarch's own proclamation in favour of the Jews, that he did know something of these Scriptures,—that he had, moreover, received from them some impressions of reverence for the power and supremacy of the God of Israel,—and that it was under the influence of these impressions that he acted, when he not only granted the Jews their liberty, but furnished them also with the means of rebuilding the house of the Lord at Jerusalem: "Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, He is the God, which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the free-will offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem." It may be farther observed, with a reference to the same event, that as thorns and briers are the figures by which the prophets were wont to describe the desolated condition of a country which had been laid waste by an enemy, and whose inhabitants had

been carried into captivity, the promise contained in the 13th verse, that instead of the thorn should come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier should come up the myrtle-tree, may be considered as receiving its fulfilment in the restoration of the Babylonish captivity; and whoever reads with attention the affecting narrative which Nehemiah has given of the state of Jerusalem, when, alone, and in the solitude of the night, he took a survey of the ruins of that once favoured city, will be ready to admit that any approach to the restoration of its former glory was indeed the accomplishment of not a little of the good things which the prophet had foretold concerning Israel. It is not without reason, then, that the passage before us has been considered as descriptive of the deliverance of the Jewish captives, their return to Judea, and their peaceful settlement in the land of their fathers; including, of course, the spiritual reformation which they had undergone. And when we consider the testimony which was borne by that event to the power, and supremacy, and faithfulness of God,—when we reflect on the sentiments of reverence and fear which his word awakened in the minds even of the heathen,—and when we contemplate the mightiest monarch of his time publicly and solemnly recognising the authority of the God of Israel, and calling upon every individual in his extensive empire to make the same acknowledgment of the sovereignty of Jehovah,—we may be ready to say of that event in the concluding words of the passage under consideration: “It shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

But though the passage before us will very well bear the interpretation that has thus been put upon it,—that is to say, though it may contain a prediction of all that God did for the Jews in their deliverance from the Babylonish captivity, and their restoration to the land of their fathers,—yet it is evident, from its connection with what goes before, that it contains a great deal more, and that the promises here given, in the full extent of their meaning, remain yet to be fulfilled. Nor let it be supposed that this application of a prophecy to two distinct and unconnected events is an unusual thing in the writings of the prophets, or that any uncertainty is thereby thrown on the meaning of the prophecy itself. The return of the Jews, after

the judgment of seventy years' captivity, occupies a prominent place in the writings of all the prophets who lived previous to that event. But it must be well known to every one who is familiar with the Bible, that, in their predictions of this restoration, many glorious things were spoken, both of the state and character of the Jews, which were not fully exemplified in their condition subsequently to that deliverance, and which cannot be accomplished in all their extent in any other way than by their conversion to the faith of the Gospel. Nor is it difficult to perceive how it should have been so. The delinquency which brought upon the Jews the judgments of God, when their country was laid waste, and the inhabitants were carried into captivity,—their subjection for a time to all the calamities of a state of bondage,—the salutary influence of this visitation, in drawing them away from the abominations of idolatry,—their return to their own land when the purposes of that righteous visitation were accomplished,—and the restoration of the privileges which they had so grievously abused, but which the temporary privation of them had taught them to value ;—all these events were themselves prophetic of the future history of that wonderful people. They embodied, so to speak, the predictions of the prophets respecting the spiritual state of Israel, in the palpable language of facts ; and they have been put on record, not as the final accomplishment of these predictions, but rather as a repetition of them, and a pledge that they will be accomplished. While we admit, therefore, that the passage before us may be considered as descriptive of the restoration of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon, we do not at all interfere with its application to their future conversion to the faith of the Gospel, nor do we give to the prophecy such a double meaning as can in any degree involve it in obscurity or doubt. Strictly speaking, indeed, we do not assign to it a double sense at all. The two events to which we suppose it to refer, may, in fact, be considered as identified,—the one being prophetic, or rather typical, of the other ; and if the condition of the Jews, subsequently to their return from the land of their captivity, did not exhibit all the glorious things that had been foretold of them, it is merely saying that temporal prosperity is at best but an imperfect and shadowy representation of spiritual blessings.

Such is the light in which I am disposed to view the restoration of Judah after their seventy years' captivity,—the place which that event occupies in the writings of the Old Testament prophets,—and the relation between the predictions of that event, and the promises of a still more glorious deliverance, when they shall be brought from under the dominion of unbelief, and added to the free and happy subjects of Messiah's spiritual kingdom. And if this view of the subject be the correct one, then the observations that have already been submitted on the passage under consideration, as applicable to one of these events, will serve to illustrate it also as applicable to the other. In the present state of the Jews, viewed in a spiritual light, we see a desolation unspeakably more dreadful than any thing that their mere temporal condition ever presented, even under the heaviest chastisements with which they were ever before visited; and if, therefore, they are ever to be delivered from this state,—if the fetters are to be broken whereby they have hitherto been held captive to the most obstinate unbelief, and the most lamentable infatuation that human nature ever exemplified,—and if they are one day to be made alive to the value, and admitted to the participation of those spiritual blessings which they have for so many ages rejected and set at nought,—there will be in that deliverance a manifestation of the power and grace of God, of which all preceding interpositions on their behalf were but faint and imperfect intimations.

But that such a deliverance does await them is most expressly declared in many places in Scripture, and is very plainly intimated in the passage before us. It is there declared that they shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace. This deliverance is, moreover, distinctly ascribed to the quickening efficacy of the word that goeth forth out of the mouth of the Lord; and we have already seen that this word is the gracious message of heavenly mercy which is published to sinners in the Gospel. Against this message, indeed, they have hitherto shut their ears; and, so far as human wisdom can judge, there is nothing, perhaps, that appears more hopeless, than the idea of their ever being persuaded that Jesus of Nazareth, whom their forefathers crucified, was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures, and to whose coming they are still vainly looking forward.

But to the dictates of human wisdom and the suggestions of men's unbelief, there stand opposed the solemn declarations of divine truth; nor are there wanting circumstances, even in the condition of the Jews themselves, which may be regarded as furnishing continued intimations that the promises of Scripture concerning them have not been forgotten, and cannot be defeated. Among the many threatenings that were denounced against them by Moses, in the event of their forsaking the Lord their God, and refusing to hearken unto his voice, it was solemnly declared that the Lord would scatter them among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other,—that among these nations they should find no ease, neither should the sole of their foot have rest,—that the Lord would give them there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind,—and that they should become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations, whither the Lord should lead them.

This threatening, as every one knows, not only has been, but still continues to be executed. Though dispersed as no other nation on earth ever was, yet they continue in every country as distinct a people as ever they were in the land of Judea; and if they are not now exposed to the severity of treatment which for many ages they experienced in almost every country in the world, it is not because they have been so incorporated with other nations as to have lost their distinctive character, but because these nations are more alive than they once were to the dictates of justice and humanity. But do we not see, in the provision which has thus been made for perpetuating the judgment that had been denounced against them, a standing pledge of the faithfulness of the promises that have been given on their behalf? Is not their continued separation from all the nations among whom they have been scattered, a continued intimation to us that some great and gracious purpose regarding them yet remains to be fulfilled? Does not that separation, which is altogether without a parallel in the history of any other people, provide for the accomplishment of Scripture prophecy concerning them, in a way too clear and unequivocal to be either mistaken or disputed? And must not their future ingathering, therefore, form no small portion of the rich and glorious harvest of the latter days? In what particular way, or by what special means,

so marvellous a triumph of divine grace shall be achieved, I do not at present inquire; nor could we, perhaps, with any degree of certainty, determine. But that it will be achieved is a matter of absolute certainty to every man who believes the Bible; while the remarkable fact to which I have been referring provides for its accomplishment in such a way as shall place the fulfilment of Scripture prophecy beyond the reach of controversy or of doubt.

When the prediction in the passage before us, therefore, is carried into effect,—when they who have been so long in a state of spiritual bondage “shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace,”—and when the Lord shall turn again the captivity of Zion, and gather together the outcasts of Israel, will there not be exemplified, in a moral and spiritual transformation of such a magnitude, all that is expressed in the figurative language of the prophet? If it was said of the departure of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, that “the sea saw it and fled; Jordan was driven back; the mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs,” how emphatically true must it be of the spiritual emancipation which awaits them, that the mountains and the hills shall break forth before them into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands! And if their return from a state of temporal captivity was set forth under the expressive figures of repairing the cities that had been overthrown, and planting the lands that had been laid waste, how truly may it not be said of their adoption into the family of God, that “instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree!” It was declared to the children of Israel, at the commencement of their journey towards the land of Canaan, that if they would obey the voice of the Lord, and keep his covenant, they should be a peculiar treasure unto him above all people. It was to glorify his great name, and demonstrate his supremacy in the sight of the heathen, that he so frequently made bare his holy arm for their deliverance. And it is of their perverseness and folly, in labouring to defeat the gracious purposes of God towards themselves, that we find the prophet Jeremiah especially complaining: “For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord; that they might be unto me for a people, and

for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory : but they would not hear." The time, however, is approaching when they will hear ; and when we think of the testimony which by their conversion God will give to the word of his grace,—when we contemplate the triumphant refutation which will thereby be given of the cavils of ungodly men,—and when we endeavour to calculate the mighty influence with which that event may be expected to operate on the world at large, we cannot fail to be convinced that it is to this the prophet especially refers, when he says, " It shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

It is plain, I think, that the conversion of the Jews is the chief point to which our attention is directed by the passage under consideration, and that there is a very distinct allusion also to the striking testimony which will thereby be borne to the power and efficacy of divine grace. It is no doubt true, that in every human heart there is a principle of resistance to the admission of the truth,—that this resistance will in no case be overcome but by the operation of a divine power,—and that in every instance, therefore, in which a sinner is turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, there is an unequivocal proof that this divine influence has been in operation. It is true, also, that Gentiles in their unconverted state are just as entirely estranged from God as Jews are,—that till they have felt the attractive influence of the divine character as it stands revealed in the Gospel, there is and can be no approach whatever on their part towards a resemblance to the divine image,—and that wherever they have undergone the spiritual regeneration which accompanies the knowledge and belief of the truth, the figurative language of the passage under consideration is just as applicable to them as to others. But with all this, there are still circumstances in the condition of the Jews which must render their conversion to the faith of the Gospel, and that in their national capacity,—which the passage before us plainly points at,—especially interesting. The simple fact that they have for so long a period manifested a peculiar hostility to the truth as it is in Jesus, must, in our apprehension of things, render the triumph of divine grace in their case peculiarly striking. And, independently of this consideration, there are

prophecies connected with their history, and special promises respecting them recorded in Scripture, the fulfilment of which must itself be fitted to convince gainsayers, inasmuch as it will in reality amount to a direct testimony from God himself to the truth of all that has been revealed in the Bible.

Nor will the consequences of that event be less interesting as it respects the character of believers. Such an accession as would thereby be made to the Church of Christ could not fail to give an impulse to the zeal of Christians that had never before been felt. And may it not be to the joy and gratitude which will then be felt by the people of God that the prophet refers, when he says in the 12th verse, "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands?" May it not, in like manner, be with a reference to the higher attainments and more elevated character of Christians, as well as to the conversion of sinners, that he says in the last verse, "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree?" And may we not understand the apostle as referring to the same happy fruits of the conversion of his countrymen, when he says, "If the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness? . . . For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" That the glory of the latter days will consist, not only in the greater number, but also in the more elevated character of Christians, is, I apprehend, a point about which there can be no doubt; and besides the more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit by which these times will be distinguished, there are circumstances in the condition of mankind themselves which may contribute to the same result. That there is a progressive advancement in the character of man, considered as an intellectual being, is abundantly evident from the accession which is every day brought to the amount of his knowledge, and the contributions which ingenuity and industry are perpetually making to the sum of his comforts; and it is equally evident, that whatever tends to exalt man's rational nature must, under the controlling influence of religious principle, serve to exalt him also as a moral and spiritual being. It is,

indeed, a melancholy fact, that hitherto the mightiest and the most successful of intellectual efforts have often been arrayed in hostility to the Gospel, rather than made subservient to its more extended promulgation,—that the most splendid discoveries of natural truth have frequently obscured, to the eye of the discoverer, the glory of the truth that has been revealed,—and that the multiplied resources from which mankind have been enabled to draw, in rich abundance, the comforts and conveniences of life, have often removed them to a greater distance from the fountain of all spiritual comfort.

But while these facts bear lamentable testimony to the perverseness of mankind in abusing the gifts of a bountiful Creator, they furnish no argument whatever against the value of the gifts so abused. It is still true that the extension of human knowledge must in the end contribute to the elevation of the Christian character; and it is either a grievous mistake or it is a most unfounded calumny to allege that the believer has reason to be suspicious of any discoveries that serve to enlarge the powers of our rational nature. In the pursuit of these discoveries, indeed, multitudes may have travelled far from the paths of righteousness, and sacrificed to the gratification of intellectual vanity the knowledge that maketh wise unto salvation. But the fruits of these labours will, nevertheless, be rendered subservient to the very cause which they were designed to injure. An impulse has thereby been given to the dissemination of knowledge, whereby mankind are progressively rising in the scale of intelligence; and the facilities for communicating knowledge, which are every day multiplying, warrant the hope that the human race, viewed in their collective capacity, are advancing towards a state of intellectual improvement that has never been exemplified at any former period of the world. When the Gospel, therefore, shall hereafter be universally diffused, and shall have come, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, will not the character of Christians generally be more elevated than it could have been at any former period? And when the highest and most cultivated understanding shall be brought to receive with childlike simplicity the Word of God,—when the pride of intellect, to which so many have fallen victims, shall be brought into subjection to the knowledge of Christ,—

and when all the activity and ingenuity which now so frequently minister to the gratification of a depraved nature shall be controlled and directed by the sanctifying influence of the truth, —will there not be in all this such a state of things, such a manifestation of divine power in bringing it about, as may be appropriately described in the words of the passage we have been considering: “Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

XXXIV.

THE INGATHERING OF THE GENTILES.

ISAIAH LVI, 1-12.

THIS chapter refers to New Testament times. It contains, in fact, a prediction of the commencement, progress, and universality of the kingdom of God under the Gospel dispensation. In the first two verses, the coming of that kingdom is announced in language substantially the same with that which John the Baptist and which our Lord himself employed, at the commencement of their public ministry. The professing people of God are here called upon to keep judgment and to do justice. This, of course, was an admonition which was at all times seasonable, and which they were bound at all times to hear and to obey. But on this occasion a special ground is stated, on which the admonition is enforced: "Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed." And so elsewhere in Scripture, we frequently find a coming manifestation of divine power, whether in mercy or in judgment, urged as a special reason why his professing people should walk humbly with him, keeping his commandments, and doing them. And the consideration is one which must commend itself to every man's conscience; for every man must feel that any peculiar manifestation of God's displeasure or favour ought to awaken on the part of his people the deepest humility or the warmest gratitude, and ought to excite them to new and more devoted obedience. The admonition, therefore,

might have been appropriately addressed to Judah and Jerusalem on any occasion when there was announced to them any one of the manifold interpositions on their behalf which God was pleased to vouchsafe to them ; for on all such occasions the announcement in substance was, that his salvation was near to come, and his righteousness was about to be revealed. But the subsequent part of the chapter plainly shows, that the predicted approach of God's salvation and revelation of his righteousness was the commencement of the Gospel dispensation, by the personal appearance of Messiah, when a salvation was to be made known of which all former deliverances wrought for the Church were but types, and when the righteousness of God was to be revealed, in the pardon of sinners, more gloriously than it had ever been in their condemnation and punishment. In the prospect, then, of this most marvellous of all the divine manifestations, the visible Church, God's professing people, are called upon to keep judgment and do justice ; just as the Baptist and our Lord himself began their public ministry by preaching wherever they came, saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." They, too, followed up this call to repentance by an exposition of the divine law in all its spirituality and rigour,—which was, in substance, what is stated in the second verse of this chapter, as an illustration of the admonition in the first verse, "Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it,"—namely, "that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil."

In this single sentence, we have a very comprehensive summary of the divine law. The observance of the first table of that law is very emphatically summed up in the expression, keeping the Sabbath from polluting it. The Sabbath from the beginning was a memorial of creation, appointed by the Creator himself to be a standing testimony to his supremacy as the only living and true God. It was said of the Sabbath, that on that day God rested from his works, and was refreshed. And the day was sanctified, or set apart as holy, that it might be to the people of God a pledge or token of their finally entering into and participating in his rest, and that in the observance of that day they might have a foretaste of the rest itself. Such being the design of the Sabbath, the spiritual observance of that

day, or, as it is here expressed, keeping the Sabbath from polluting it, implied, on the part of those who did so, that they knew, and acknowledged, and worshipped God as the only true God, and their God, and that they were truly anxious to glorify him in every thing whereby he had made himself known. In other words, keeping the Sabbath from polluting it comprehended all that is contained in the first table of the law. And so, in like manner, the second table is summed up in the expression, "Keeping the hand from doing any evil." And thus, when the prophet says, in the first verse, "Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed," he announces the coming of Messiah's kingdom, as Messiah himself, and his forerunner afterwards, announced it, when they said, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Having thus foretold, as if it were very near, the commencement of the new dispensation, the prophet proceeds to set forth the blessings and privileges which were to be enjoyed under it. And this he does in Old Testament language. He describes Messiah's kingdom, not as the introduction of blessings altogether new, but rather as the extension to men of all nations of those privileges which the Church already enjoyed under the old economy, but which had hitherto been confined to the Jews. He represents the house of God, the temple at Jerusalem, as about to be thrown open to those who by the law of Moses had been expressly excluded from it; and by this representation he declares, in a very emphatic manner, that the blessings of the great salvation were to be freely and fully proclaimed to all without exception. To the Old Testament Church, this was the most expressive language which the prophet could employ. To them,—I mean to such as were true believers, and therefore spiritual worshippers,—the highest and most valuable privilege which they could enjoy or conceive of was liberty of access to the house of God, where they might present their sacrifices and burnt-offerings, and where they might wait in the confident expectation that in due time the high priest would come forth from the holy of holies, and pronounce upon them the blessing wherewith Moses had been instructed to bless the children of Israel: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make

his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." I need hardly remark of this blessing, that it contained in substance the whole Gospel,—even the proclamation of pardon and peace to the guilty. The ground of this proclamation, indeed, was not so fully revealed to the Old Testament saints as it now is to us. They saw the atoning sacrifice of Christ only as it was typified in the sacrifices which they themselves offered. But the acceptance of these sacrifices was to them an unequivocal assurance that there was a ground on which God could consistently pardon the guilty,—that with him there was forgiveness that he might be feared, even mercy and plenteous redemption.

It was this that constituted, in the minds of true believers, the privilege of access to the house of God. Mere admission to the courts of the temple, and to the formal observance of its ordinances, would have availed them nothing, if they had not heard, in the blessing of the high priest, an assurance that their persons and their services had been accepted in the sight of God. But we cannot doubt that with this blessing countless multitudes of humble spiritual worshippers, many of whom, it may be, had approached the house of God sorrowful and cast down in spirit, returned to their own house joyful and glad of heart for all the grace and the goodness which the Lord had made to pass before them. So it must have been during the purer and better period of the Old Testament Church; and though the time of the prophet Isaiah was a very degenerate time, yet even then there was a faithful remnant,—some who knew experimentally the value of their privilege in having access to the house of God,—not merely admission within the precincts of the place which he had chosen to put his name there, but access to God himself in the exercise of spiritual worship. And how marvellous to them must have been the prediction in the passage before us! It announced the free admission to the house of God of the eunuch and the stranger, or Gentile, both of whom were expressly shut out by the law of Moses from the congregation of the Lord. Even to mere formalists, the nominal Israel, such an announcement must have been very strange, and, indeed, very offensive; for they would regard it as derogatory to their character that Gentiles should be placed on the same ground with themselves, as to the

enjoyment of privileges which they believed to be the exclusive privileges of the children of Abraham. Indeed, true believers themselves might, perhaps, to some extent, participate in this feeling. And we know in fact that they did so; for when this prediction was about to be carried into effect soon after the day of Pentecost, not only the believing Jews generally, but the apostles themselves were slow to believe that the Gospel was to be proclaimed at once, and in all its fulness and freeness, to Gentiles as well as Jews. But the prophet's language ought to have taught the Church of his own time, and still more the Christian Church in the time of the apostles, that the admission of Gentiles to all the privileges of the Jews, so far from being derogatory to the Old Testament dispensation, was in fact its highest honour,—the glorious consummation of the great purpose which that dispensation was from the beginning intended to serve. The privileges which belonged to Israel have been thus enumerated by the apostle:—To them, he says, pertained “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;” theirs were “the fathers,” and of them, “as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever.”

If the Jews had understood and rightly appreciated these privileges,—and had they as a people recognised and acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah promised unto their fathers,—they would have seen it to be their honour, their crowning distinction, to receive believing Gentiles into the bosom of the Church, and would have felt that their own privileges were unspeakably enhanced in value by being shared with other nations. It was obviously in this view of the subject that the prophet gave utterance to this prediction. It was not in the way of threatening, but in the way of encouraging the true Church, that he foretold the ingathering of the Gentiles, and the extension to them of the blessings which the Old Testament Church had long enjoyed; because his prediction of all this implied a great, an unspeakably great enlargement of the blessings and privileges which the Church had from the beginning enjoyed. If, then, the Jews as a people did not participate in these enlarged blessings,—if, instead of being still pre-eminently the Church of God, receiving into her bosom Gentile nations as a younger

sister, they were cut off, and others adopted in their room,—it was because of their unbelief, because they wilfully and deliberately rejected the privilege and the honour of being instrumental in consummating the glorious purpose of the Old Testament economy,—that of preparing the way for the more full and extended establishment of Messiah's kingdom. But that purpose was not to be defeated by their folly and unbelief. Though Israel were not gathered, yet Messiah was to be glorious in the eyes of the Lord. The prediction in the passage before us, as well as many similar predictions, was not to fail; and if the Jews would not consent to remain in the house of God, and receive Gentiles to worship with them there, it was necessary that they should be cast out, and others received in their room,—even the eunuch and the stranger, who had from the beginning been excluded from the congregation of the Lord. Their admission to the house of God under the new dispensation does not, of course, mean merely, or even mainly, freedom of access to the material temple at Jerusalem; for that was a privilege which comparatively few of the nations could enjoy. It obviously implied a participation in all the spiritual blessings which, under the old economy, were wont to be imparted to true worshippers through the medium of the temple service. And it has been well observed, that of this fulfilment of the prediction before us we have a beautiful example, and a most striking illustration, in the history of the Ethiopian eunuch, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The circumstances and manner of that individual's conversion to the faith of the Gospel, his baptism by Philip in the desert, and the joy and peace in believing wherewith he was filled, have been put on record in God's own Word, there to stand, till the end of time, a monument of redeeming grace and power, and an example also of the literal fulfilment of the prediction before us: "Thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off."

And what the prophet thus foretold of the eunuch is in substance declared also of the stranger: "Also the sons of the

stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." I have already remarked, that in selecting these two classes, and foretelling their free admission into the house of God, the prophet did very emphatically declare that the blessings of the great salvation were to be freely tendered to men of all nations and tongues without exception, and that this admission did not mean merely, or even mainly, access to the material temple or house of God in Jerusalem, but a full participation in all the spiritual blessings which God's true people had been wont to enjoy there,—enlarged, of course, by the clearer and more complete revelation of the covenant of grace, which was to be vouchsafed under the new dispensation. These blessings are set forth in Old Testament language; for it was the only language that would have been intelligible to those whom the prophet addressed. Hence it is said of the children of the stranger, that is, of Gentiles generally, that they should be made joyful in God's house of prayer, and that their burnt-offerings and sacrifices should be accepted upon his altar. This language, of course, cannot be understood in its literal acceptation as applicable to Gospel times, when there ceased to be any house of God at Jerusalem, and when burnt-offerings and sacrifices were no longer required or permitted,—the one great sacrifice having been offered, whereby Christ hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified. But though the language of the prophet is not literally applicable to the manner in which believers under the New Testament dispensation are made partakers of a comforting sense of their acceptance with God,—inasmuch as burnt-offerings and sacrifices are no longer presented,—yet the language is not on that account the less precise, or emphatic, or full of meaning. It implied that whatever might be their form of worship, or the manner in which they approached God to do him homage and ask his blessing, their homage would as certainly be accepted as ever the burnt-offerings and sacrifices of God's true people were in the tabernacle

of Moses, or in the temple on Mount Zion; and that a sense of God's favour would as certainly be imparted to them as it ever was to the Old Testament saints, by the blessing wherewith the high priest was instructed to bless Israel. But it is, moreover, plain, I think, that it was to the social and public worship of the New Testament Church that the prophet especially referred,—the worship that did most nearly resemble the temple services at Jerusalem. The whole tenor of the prophet's language seems to intimate this. It was in the house of God, and within his walls, that the eunuch was to have a place and a name; it was there that the children of the stranger were to be joyful, and there their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices were to be accepted on God's altar;—language which, though not to be understood literally, did obviously imply that it was especially in the public assemblies of the saints that the promised blessings were to be imparted.

And this view of the subject is farther confirmed by the special and repeated reference to the Sabbath in this passage. Three times do we find the observance of that day set forth as one of the distinguishing marks of a child of God,—as a proof that the fear of God rules in the heart,—and that the enjoyment of fellowship with God is esteemed the highest and best of privileges. And it is to those who thus regard the Sabbath of the Lord as holy and honourable, that the promise is given of being made joyful in God's house of prayer, and of having their burnt-offerings and sacrifices accepted upon his altar. The promise, then, as applicable to the New Testament Church, is a promise of special blessings on the public assemblies of the saints, while engaged in the exercises of God's holy day,—a promise which was subsequently renewed by the Saviour himself, when he said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And if the prophet, in giving forth this prediction, beheld in vision, as I think he did, the universal spread of the Gospel,—the ingathering of the nations into the Church of God,—how glorious must have been the prospect which was opened up to him, when he spoke of the eunuch having in God's house, and within his walls, "a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters," and of the children of the stranger being brought to God's holy mountain, being made joyful in his

house of prayer, and having their burnt-offerings and sacrifices accepted upon his altar. The prophet foresaw, in the fulfilment of this prophecy, an unspeakably more glorious spectacle than the temple at Jerusalem, even in the purest periods of the Old Testament Church, ever exhibited. No doubt, Jerusalem, in the purer days of the Church, did present a glorious sight: "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge." The people of God were glad when it was said unto them, "Let us go into the house of the Lord," when their feet stood within the gates of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was builded as a city that is compact together. Thither the tribes went up, "the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." For there were "set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David." But how much more glorious was the prospect opened up to the prophet, when he beheld in vision the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth, as the waters cover the sea,—when he saw, not at Jerusalem alone, but everywhere in every land, men worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth,—when he beheld, as it were, the walls of God's house embracing all the kingdoms of the earth,—and when in every worshipping assembly God was to be present by his Spirit, even as he dwelt at Jerusalem of old in the cloud of glory over the mercy-seat! The literal Mount Zion has long ceased to be the special dwelling-place of Jehovah; for there is no longer a material temple there for the habitation of his glory. But the promise to Zion, as the Church, is unchangeable: "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread." This promise has never failed of being fulfilled in the experience of believers, and it is in progress towards a more glorious fulfilment than has yet been experienced, when the state of things foreseen by the prophet shall be realised. That consummation may yet be distant, and it may be preceded by times of great tribulation. So the prophet warned Jerusalem and Judah in his day, as we find in the concluding verses of this chapter, where he foretells the terrible judgments which were to overtake them because of

abounding iniquity,—judgments which were obviously to precede the glorious period which he had foretold in the first part of the chapter, and the execution of which is now a matter of history. And as the commencement of the new dispensation was accompanied with great tribulations, because of despised and misimproved privileges, so its consummation, in the universal spread of the Gospel, may in like manner be preceded by similar calamities, for which there is abundant cause, and which the general tenor of Scripture would lead us to expect. But whatever may be the extent or the duration of these calamities, the state of things here foretold will assuredly be realised : “The Lord God, which gathereth the outcasts of Israel, saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.” For “it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills ; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob ; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths : for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people : and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks : nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

It appears, then, that the prediction in the passage before us will receive its full accomplishment only in the last days, when the name of Christ shall be known in all the earth, and his saving health among all nations,—when a pure offering shall be offered unto God, from the rising to the setting sun. But there is nothing in this to diminish the value of the promises contained in this chapter to believers now, or to prevent them from enjoying in rich abundance the peace, and comfort, and encouragement which these promises are fitted and designed to impart. If we are Christians, if we really believe in Christ, then the promises have been to some extent fulfilled in regard to us. We are children of the stranger,—Gentiles,—naturally aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. But God has brought us to his holy mountain, and to

his house of prayer, in the very terms of the promise in this passage. We have never, it is true, ascended Mount Zion at Jerusalem, or entered the material temple, or house of prayer, which once stood there; but we have been brought to what is spiritually and truly God's holy mountain and God's house, and of which the material mountain and house at Jerusalem were but types. For how does the apostle reckon up the privileges of believers under the new dispensation? "Ye are come," says he, "unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Such is our place and position, if we have indeed been enabled to believe in Christ. In us has been fulfilled the promise here recorded by the prophet, "Also the sons of the stranger . . . will I bring to my holy mountain."

But there is a second promise: "I will make them joyful in my house of prayer." This promise, I think, has a special reference, as I have already remarked, to the assemblies of the saints,—the social and public worship of God on his holy day. And the promise is expressed in very unqualified terms. It follows upon the preceding promise as if it formed a part of it,—or, at least, as if they were inseparably connected; as if it were designed to assert, that they who have been brought to God's holy mountain will assuredly be made joyful in his house of prayer. How far, then, have we usually, or at any time, experienced the fulfilment of this promise, while waiting on God in his ordinances? And as often as we have observed these ordinances without experiencing any spiritual joy in them, or deriving any sensible benefit from them, has it been a subject of serious concern with us why it was that we were not made joyful in God's house of prayer? These questions are very momentous to all; and if they were solemnly entertained, they could hardly fail to disclose to all their true spiritual state. It is hardly to be expected, indeed, that formalists,—mere nominal professors,—will be induced to enter solemnly on such a search-

ing inquiry into the state of their soul in regard to spiritual things. They never were, and, in their present condition, they never can be, joyful in God's house of prayer; nor have they any desire to be so, in the true spiritual sense of that expression. They may have been brought, by the force of long habit, to endure the services of God's house, without being very weary or impatient; nay, they may sometimes be pleased with what they find there, for there may be something in the manner in which divine truth is presented to them which may gratify their taste, though that truth has never savingly or seriously affected their heart. But joyful they cannot be with any thing spiritual,—that is, with any thing that essentially belongs to the service of God's house. And, conscious as they must be that it is so, there is surely enough in the promise here recorded, if they would but reflect, to disclose to them their true state,—to convince them that they have not yet been really brought to God's holy mountain,—that their connection with the Church is but an outward and visible thing, through which no spiritual benefit can ever be imparted to them,—that they are still what they were at first, and naturally, “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” But believers themselves may, perhaps, have reason to acknowledge that they are neither so frequently nor so abundantly joyful in the house of God as the largeness of the promise might warrant them to expect, and, moreover, that they are not always so careful and so anxious as they ought to be to discover why it is that the ordinances of God do so often prove lifeless and insipid to them. There is surely enough in such a state of things, if long continued, to awaken the suspicion, that spiritual declension has not only commenced, but made such progress as ought to alarm them. If the time was when they could say, from their actual experience, that it was good for them to draw near unto God; if they can recollect seasons in which, while waiting on God in his ordinances, they experienced enlargement and relief under spiritual depression,—when their fears were dispelled by the revival of hope,—when their wounded spirits were soothed under affliction, and reconciled to dispensations against which they had been ready to rebel,—and when they felt themselves invigorated and

strengthened for the duties and trials of life;—if they can recollect seasons like these, surely it is an alarming symptom of spiritual decline and deadness, if they can now rest satisfied without any such experience, or if they are not constrained to say with a saint of old, “Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness.”

But even when there is not any such spiritual declension, believers may have been disappointed in not experiencing the fulfilment of the promise, that they should be made joyful in God’s house of prayer. They may have expected little, or they may have been looking for what they expected to the wrong quarter. If the former,—if their expectations have been low and limited,—if they did not really hope and look for large communications of light, and life, and comfort, can they wonder that they did not receive largely? God is faithful to his promise, and that in its largest sense; for his language is, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” But they are straitened in themselves, and therefore they do not receive. It may, however, be from the other cause that they have been disappointed. They may have been looking for what of joy and comfort they did expect to the wrong quarter,—I mean to mere human instrumentality. It is to be remembered that part of the promise to the people of God is, “Their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar.” This promise, as applicable to New Testament times, is to be understood, of course, as meaning spiritual offerings and sacrifices. And so the New Testament writers have explained it. The apostle, in his Epistle to the Romans, speaks of believers presenting their “bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” In the Epistle to the Hebrews, he speaks of offering “the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of the lips, giving thanks to his name.” And the apostle Peter represents believers, of course New Testament believers, “as lively stones, built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” Now, the spiritual sacrifices which are thus explained in the New Testament, and of which this passage promises that they shall be accepted upon God’s altar, comprehend a great deal more than the mere hear-

ing of the Word, and especially a great deal more than human expositions of that Word. But what I fear is, that many wait upon the ordinances of God mainly, if not exclusively, for the purpose of hearing mere human expositions of divine truth, regarding as a secondary thing those exercises of praise, and prayer, and thanksgiving in which they engage, and which mainly constitute the burnt-offerings and sacrifices which it is here promised shall be accepted on God's altar. And if so, can they wonder that the preaching of the Word should not impart to them all the comfort, and consolation, and encouragement which they wished and expected? They have been looking to the mere human instrument, when they should have been looking to the Saviour, through whose great sacrifice alone their sacrifices can be accepted. They have been applying to the earthen vessel, when they should have been going to the inexhaustible fountain of living water. And if they would have the preached Word to be more rich in consolation to their souls, they must be more frequent in private prayer, and more anxious in the house of God to offer there, in praise and prayer, a spiritual service, acceptable unto God through Jesus Christ.

XXXV.

THE LORD'S PRESENCE IN THE MIDST OF JUST JUDGMENTS.

ISAIAH LVII. 1-21.

IN the first part of the preceding chapter, the prophet had recorded the vision which he saw of New Testament times,—the opening of the house of God to those who, during the Old Testament economy, had been shut out from it,—or, in other words, the ingathering of the Gentiles into the Church of God, and their consequent participation in all the blessings of the everlasting covenant. But in the last four verses of the chapter, he warned the men of Judah and Jerusalem of his own day, and those, too, of later times, that, before the glorious state of things which he had previously foretold was realised, very terrible judgments awaited the visible Church, because of the hypocrisy and abounding iniquity with which she was chargeable. He represented the enemies of Judah and Jerusalem under the figure of wild beasts, let loose to destroy at their pleasure. “All ye beasts of the field,” says he, in the 9th verse, “come to devour, yea, all ye beasts in the forest.” And then, in the next three,—the concluding verses of the chapter,—he sets forth Judah, or the visible Church, under the figure of a flock unguarded, or not cared for,—a flock whose shepherds were dumb dogs, that could not bark, or give warning,—yea, greedy dogs, who thought not of their flock, but of their own indulgence and sloth. And what must be the desolation that was wrought in such a flock, when all the

beasts of the field, yea, all the beasts of the forest, were let loose upon it to devour and to destroy? The subject thus introduced at the close of the preceding chapter, in general but very emphatic terms, is continued and still farther illustrated in the chapter before us. In the first verse, the prophet represents righteous men as taken away, or removed by death; and he speaks of their removal not only in reference to the righteous themselves, but as it concerned the community from which they were removed; and, in both points of view, it serves to place in a striking light the severity of the judgments that were coming upon the land. Of the righteous, it is said that they were "taken away from the evil to come,"—an expression the import of which we find explained in the case of some individuals who occupied a conspicuous place among Old Testament saints. Thus, when Isaiah announced to Hezekiah that the time would come when Judah and Jerusalem should be carried captive to Babylon, Hezekiah acknowledged it to be a very gracious dispensation towards himself personally that he was not to see the judgment which the prophet had foretold. Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, 'Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken.' "Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?" And, in like manner, in the case of Josiah, Hezekiah's grandson, it is recorded as a special token of God's favour to him, that he should not live to see the calamities that were coming on Judah and Jerusalem. These calamities were announced to Josiah in a message from Huldah the prophetess. But the same message contained an assurance that Josiah should not see these calamities. "Tell the man that sent you to me," said the prophetess, "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read. But to the king of Judah, which sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation, and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold, therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou

shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place." When it is said, therefore, in the passage before us, that the righteous were "taken away from the evil to come," the expression does very emphatically represent the terrible nature of the threatened judgments. And so does the prophet's statement respecting the removal of the righteous, as that was regarded by the people at large. "The righteous perisheth," he says,—that is, he is lost to the community,—“but no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.” The visible Church, the community at large, did not feel, and could not estimate, the loss which they sustained when one after another of the faithful remnant was removed, no more by their holy life to reprove the ungodly, and to encourage those who had not yet altogether cast off the fear of God. They did not perceive, as they ought to have done, the solemn intimation which was thereby given to them of coming judgment; for if the righteous continued to perish, and merciful men to be taken away, what could they expect the end to be, but that they should become as Sodom, and be made like unto Gomorrah?

Such, it is obvious, was the warning which the prophet was commissioned to address to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem in his own time, and which was recorded for the instruction of after-ages. And with this general warning, he proceeds to show that they could look for nothing else than the execution of God's righteous judgment on such stout-hearted rebellion as that with which they were chargeable. He states, in very strong language, and with great minuteness of detail, their idolatrous practices, representing the sin of idolatry in the very expressive terms in which it is usually represented in the writings of the prophets, namely, as the sin of adultery,—the unfaithfulness of a wife forsaking her husband,—language which represented their guilt as very dark and aggravated, inasmuch as it reminded them that they were chargeable not only with the folly of disowning and casting off the true God for the sake of dumb idols, but with the guilt and ingratitude of denying Him who through many successive generations had done wonderful things for them and for their fathers, and who had condescended

to call himself their husband. The prophet, moreover, puts it to them, whether it was not true that their confidence in their idols had been utterly disappointed, that they were wearied in their pursuit of vanities, and that yet, because they were not utterly consumed, they persevered in their vain attempt to find enlargement and relief in the help of the idolatrous nations around them. "Thou art wearied," he says in the 10th verse, "in the greatness of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou hast found the life of thine hand,"—that is, Thou hast still some life, or strength, through God's sparing mercy,—“therefore thou wast not grieved.” And while thus in reality placing their confidence in false gods, and seeking help from the votaries of these gods, they did, at the same time, make some pretence of worshipping Jehovah, mingling the rites of heathen worship with the appointed ordinances of God's house. This we know from history was the conduct of the men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem in the time of Isaiah. And this hypocrisy was not the least offensive part of their conduct. It is especially referred to in the 11th verse, “And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart? have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not?”—that is, Thou hast professed to fear and be afraid of me, but thou hast lied in so doing, for thou hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart; and is it not true that thou hast been presuming upon my forbearance, and because I have long held my peace, and refrained from visiting thy transgressions with righteous judgments, therefore thou fearest me not? But this forbearance was now at an end. God was no longer to keep silence, as is announced in the 12th verse, “I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee,”—that is, I will try the righteousness on which thou reliest, and the works of which thou makest thy boast, and show that they cannot profit thee; for instead of justifying they will condemn thee. And then the result of this trial, when God riseth to the judgment, is stated in the 13th verse, “When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee; but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take them.”

And how many are there still in the visible Church to whom this language might be addressed! Though idolatry, in different

ages, may have assumed different forms, more or less palpable and revolting, yet in every age the sin of men has been essentially idolatry,—the sin of giving to something else that place in the heart and affections which is due to God alone. This is the true character of every unregenerate man; and if in this state men profess to believe God's revealed will, and outwardly observe those ordinances by which he has taught his people to do him homage, then they are open to the same charge which the prophet brought against the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. That charge was, that while they professed to fear the Lord by outwardly observing some of the rites which he had appointed, they were really giving their fear, their true homage, their confidence to idols. And in their case the hypocrisy with which they were chargeable was too gross and palpable to be concealed,—it was as foolish as it was sinful; inasmuch as they openly practised idolatrous rites, and did thereby daringly and presumptuously defy God, at the very moment that they outwardly observed his ordinances. Of course the hypocrisy of mere nominal Christians cannot be so glaring; for they have no temptation to practise outward idolatry. But their sin is essentially the same. They draw near unto God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, but their heart goeth after covetousness. And should such become the general character of a Christian community,—should formality and indifference so extensively prevail as that a country ceases to be Christian in every thing but the name,—how perilous would be the condition even of the few righteous that may be found therein! how hardly would they escape being infected with the prevailing spirit of cold and lifeless formality! and how little prepared would they be for those judgments which such a community would have too much reason to expect! In such a state of things, when “the righteous perisheth, and merciful men are taken away,” it may be, as it was of old, that they are “taken away from the evil to come.”

Such was the condition of the visible Church as described in the passage before us; and from that description, as well as from the threatenings which accompanied it, it might appear as if a full end was to be made of Jerusalem and Judah. But God remembered his covenant. By that covenant he had reserved a remnant to himself in the Old Testament Church, even in the

worst times; and by the same covenant his faithfulness was pledged to preserve that remnant from apostasy, either by delivering them from the trials and temptations before which they might be ready to fall, or with the temptation making a way for their escape that they might be able to bear it. Some of them he removed by death,—taking them “away from the evil to come;”—a consideration which may and ought to comfort many a bereaved mourner, inasmuch as thereby many of God’s children have been spared a conflict which might have brought them to the very verge, if not of apostasy, at least of despondency or despair, as if, by their concessions and compromises, to which in bad times even good men, especially merciful or peaceful men, may be driven, they had denied “the Lord that bought them,” and had given “occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.” Death, I doubt not, has spared many a child of God this fearful conflict; and how truly, therefore, may it not be said of such, that they were “taken away from the evil to come!” But, according to the terms or conditions of the everlasting covenant, God could not so deal with all his children; that is to say, he could not, even in kindness to them, remove them all from the evil to come, or spare them the pain and the danger of encountering evil times, at the hazard, humanly speaking, of being tempted or terrified into an abandonment of their principles. God must have a Church on the earth, otherwise the earth would be one great Sodom and Gomorrah, which even a divine forbearance could not spare. That Church, moreover, must necessarily be in Judah and Jerusalem; for it was from the tribe of Judah that the great Deliverer was to come,—even Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the nations was to be. In regard, therefore, to his remnant,—those whom God saw meet to subject to all the severity of a fiery trial,—he did in the midst of wrath remember mercy. There is reason to believe, from what is here stated, that some at least of that remnant had, to a certain extent, been drawn away from their steadfastness, through the influence of abounding iniquity,—that they had been infected with the prevailing spirit of covetousness, and for a time had gone on frowardly in the way of their heart; but even in regard to them, God’s purposes were purposes of mercy; and, therefore, as it is said in the 18th verse,

he saw their ways, and resolved to heal them,—to lead them also, and restore comforts to them.

And in regard to others of God's people, those who sorrowed and were downcast in spirit because of abounding iniquity, and who sighed and cried for all the abominations that were done in the midst of Jerusalem, a very gracious promise was given in immediate connection with the announcement of the judgments which were coming on the land: "When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee; but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take them: but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain." Nor was the promise merely a general one, announcing protection or deliverance in the hour of trial. It set forth God's gracious watchfulness over them, declaring that he saw the point at which they would be ready to faint, and where their spiritual interests would be in jeopardy, and that he would interpose and remove the pressure of the trial when it became too heavy for them to bear: "He that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain; and shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people." It is said in the 125th Psalm, "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever. For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity;" that is, the wicked shall not be permitted to tempt or try God's people so long or so severely as to overcome their faith, and drive them into apostasy. And the same sentiment is expressed in the words before us, "Take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people." There had been a stumbling-block in the way of God's people, namely, abounding iniquity, with which some at least had been made to stumble, if not irrecoverably to fall; and coming judgments might prove a stumbling-block also. But assurance was given them that this stumbling-block should, in regard to them, be so far removed that their safety should be provided for,—that though they should fall, they should not be utterly cast down; for the Lord would uphold them with his hand. And since the day that this promise was given and recorded, how often has it been fulfilled, not

only to the Church collectively, but to believers individually! Nay, may I not rather ask, where is the believer who has not experienced the fulfilment of this promise? For is there any believer who cannot recollect seasons when his fears were disappointed, in a way that he neither looked for nor could have conceived of, when some unexpected event, and one which at the time he might think a very untoward and distressing event, prevented him from forming a connection, or being brought into circumstances, which, as he afterwards discovered, would have been very perilous to his spiritual interests,—when some seasonable though very painful affliction interposed to disarm a temptation before which he would have been ready to fall, or to awaken him from a state of deadness and insensibility which naturally tended to spiritual death; or when, in the midst of severe and protracted, and, it may be, accumulated afflictions, which he began to feel were beyond his power of endurance, he experienced alleviations or support which surprised him at the time, but which he was afterwards convinced could only come from Him who has said, “My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness?” I am persuaded that there is no true believer who has not experienced enlargement and relief from what would have placed his spiritual interests in jeopardy, in one or other of the ways that I have now stated, or in some similar way, though perhaps at the time the manner of his deliverance was not joyous but grievous; and every such case is just an example of the faithfulness of the promise, “Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people.”

Though nothing more, then, had been said, there was enough in this declaration to revive the spirit and to reassure the hearts of God's people in the prophet's day, and much to comfort and encourage believers of all times. It was a declaration that however severe their trials might be, and however hopeless their escape might appear, a way would assuredly be opened up for their deliverance, so that they should be able to bear the temptation. And to the remnant of Isaiah's time, such an assurance must have been peculiarly seasonable and refreshing, called upon, as they were, to contend with abounding iniquity,—which, like an overflowing flood, threatened to carry them away;

and anticipating, as they had good reason to do, the execution of long-threatened judgments. But that declaration was not the whole of the gracious message with which the prophet was charged. It was followed up by one of the richest and most affecting promises to be found in Scripture,—a promise expressed in such a way as to imply that it was designed to be appropriated and applied by every believing penitent to himself personally: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” The preceding declaration, “Take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people,” though very gracious and consoling, might have been regarded, perhaps, as addressed to the Church collectively, and as announcing some future and distant deliverance for God’s people in their national capacity; and individuals, therefore, might have doubted whether they were warranted to found upon it any hope of immediate relief and enlargement from the trials under which they were ready to sink. But the marvellous promise with which that declaration was followed up went directly to remove all such doubt. It did not, indeed, promise that their trials should cease. But it promised what was infinitely better,—even that they should be strengthened, and helped, and upheld, by the mighty power of Jehovah himself. The language, too, in which the promise was expressed was peculiarly fitted to awaken at once their admiration and their confidence. Such condescension as that language expressed might, perhaps, have appeared to the humble and downcast in spirit as incredible,—as condescension altogether inconsistent with the character and glorious perfections of Jehovah. But, as if to remove any such fear or suspicion, God was graciously pleased to introduce his promise with an assertion of his supremacy as the only living and true God, thereby most emphatically assuring them that he, who himself knew best what it was befitting his character to do, did not think it inconsistent with his glorious majesty, as “the high and lofty One” inhabiting eternity, and dwelling “in the high and holy place,” to dwell “with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.”

The same language, too, must have reminded them of another proof of the divine condescension, with which they must have been all their lifetime familiar, and the recollection of which must have rendered the promise peculiarly interesting and encouraging. I refer to the fact that God had from the beginning dwelt among the children of Israel by a visible symbol of his glory, first in the tabernacle constructed by Moses in the wilderness, and afterwards in the temple erected by Solomon at Jerusalem. This was, indeed, a very marvellous display of the divine condescension. It drew from Solomon an expression of his profound admiration, when, at the dedication of the temple, he exclaimed, "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" And such must have been the sentiment of every devout man in Israel. Whether in the time of Isaiah the symbol of the divine presence still dwelt in the temple,—whether the cloud of glory continued to overshadow the mercy-seat, and the voice was still heard from the holy oracle, I do not know. But we know that the kings, and priests, and people of Judah, had by that time done more than enough to forfeit that precious privilege, and to provoke God to withdraw from the house which had been built to his name every intimation of his presence and every token of his favour. We know that in the course of the period during which Isaiah prophesied, the house of God had been profaned and polluted by many idolatrous rites,—nay, that it was for a period actually shut up, while Jerusalem was everywhere filled with idols. In these circumstances, if the glory of the Lord, which once filled the house of God, had not already departed, the faithful remnant, who mourned over the growing ungodliness of their country, must have felt that they had but too much reason to fear that such an intimation of the divine displeasure and desertion could be at no great distance. And if so, how inexpressibly consoling and encouraging must it have been to them to be assured, that even though Jerusalem should be forsaken, and the temple itself be deserted, and cease to be the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory, yet he would find for himself a dwelling-place in every humble and contrite heart, reviving "the spirit of the humble," and reviving "the heart of the contrite ones!"

It was thus that the promise must have been peculiarly interesting and emphatic to the faithful remnant in Judah and Jerusalem, to whom it was originally addressed. It is one example, among many, of the marvellous grace and condescension of God's dealings with his people, in not only giving them promises full of encouragement and comfort, but conveying these promises in such a way as to be peculiarly adapted to the circumstances of his Church at the time they were given. This is a view of the compassion and kindness of God which cannot fail to touch the heart of believers of all times. The promises, too, which were so given, were designed for believers of all times; and He who knew how to adapt these promises to the circumstances of his people at the time they were given, and was graciously pleased to do so, knows also how to make that application of them to believers still which their condition may require, and will render them as consoling and encouraging as when they were originally spoken. With regard to this promise, it is still the property of the Church; for it has been repeatedly renewed by Christ himself. "If a man love me," says he, "he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." He has, moreover, explained to us more fully and more clearly wherein consists this dwelling of God with the humble and contrite of heart. It is the indwelling of the Spirit. "I will pray the Father," said he to the disciples, "and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." And "he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." The apostle, in like manner, declares in his Epistle to the Corinthians, "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" And again he says, "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the

Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." The passage before us, then, contains a very comprehensive statement of the gracious operations of the Spirit on the soul, from the commencement of his work, when he first awakens convictions of sin, till that work is completed at death, when the soul is made perfect in holiness, being conformed in all things to the image of the Son of God.

There is, no doubt, a special reference here to the work of the Spirit as the Comforter, imparting peace to the wounded conscience; and this will ever be to the believer a most precious view of the Spirit's gracious work. But God is also represented here, not as visiting for a season the humble and the contrite, at such times as they might especially need consolation or support, but as dwelling, or taking up his abode with them,—language which, like that of the New Testament, already quoted, implies the continued gracious presence of the Spirit, and the continued operation of his quickening, comforting, strengthening, and sanctifying power. The first indication of the Spirit's presence to a soul is in the conviction of sin,—a quickening, not to life, but to a sense of death,—to the feeling of being cut off from God, the fountain of life,—and to the conviction that without restoration to the favour of God, there can be nothing but hopeless misery. The soul in which these convictions are first awakened may and frequently does struggle hard to suppress and stifle them; and by thus resisting the Spirit's work, which is felt to be very painful, but, notwithstanding, very gracious, the conflict, before yielding to these convictions, may be very protracted, and the poor, helpless, but self-righteous soul may bring upon itself for a long period an amount of self-inflicted suffering which it were difficult to estimate. I say, self-inflicted; for the gracious purpose of the Spirit in awakening such convictions is to persuade the soul to come to Christ, who would give it, immediately and without delay, the rest which he promises to the weary and heavy-laden. But though this conflict may be long,—though the awakened sinner may at first seek to put down his convictions altogether, and to brave even the terrors of the Lord's displeasure,—and then, when this will not do, and

when he feels that he must come to Christ if he is to be saved, may lengthen out the conflict still farther, by seeking, in a self-righteous spirit, to find something in himself that may warrant him to come to Christ;—I say, though the conflict which a soul, when first awakened, thus undergoes, may be very long as well as very severe, yet the awakening being the work of the Spirit, though it may for a time be arrested, he will not permit it to be marred and defeated. He will bring the sinner at last to see and feel that he must come to Christ just as he is,—that he must be contented to be a debtor to Christ for pardon,—and that true humility consists in believing that pardon is freely tendered to him for Christ's sake, and in thankfully taking what is freely given. And when brought to this point, the Spirit will proceed with his work, it may be more rapidly, by so enlightening the sinner's mind in the knowledge of Christ as to make him feel that the Saviour is infinitely worthy of all his admiration, reverence, gratitude, confidence, and love. And when the soul is brought into this state, it may feel as if the battle were fought and won. And so it might be, did the soul hold fast the beginning of its confidence, so as not to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel. But, alas! the Spirit is often grieved even by the soul for which he has done all this. The things of time and sense do often again acquire the influence which they had for a season lost, and with that the soul loses its relish for spiritual and divine things. And if so, is it wonderful that the Spirit should cease for a time to be a Comforter,—nay, that he should be a reprover? And so he will prove to be. We must never forget that the Word, the revealed truth of God, as contained in the Bible, is the great instrument which the Spirit employs, whether for convincing, or quickening, or comforting, or sanctifying. He can, therefore, and he does employ it for reproving also, and sharply rebuking. And, accordingly, the backsliding believer will find that the very Word, which once conveyed to him comfort and encouragement, becomes strangely fraught with what he feels to be not merely reproof, but something like condemnation; and he sinks into great depression and darkness. This, of course, is the Spirit's work, though, during the sinner's season of trouble, he cannot think so. It appears to him rather as an utter desertion by the

Spirit altogether. But the chastisement is necessary, and will prove salutary. He will be humbled, and in due time God will raise him up. For thus saith the Lord, "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." "I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners." Such is the Spirit's gracious dealing with the humble and contrite in spirit,—not because there is any thing meritorious in their humility, and contrition, and godly sorrow, which entitles them to be so dealt with, but because they are willing to be so treated; for true humility, true brokenness of spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price, is that which prompts the sinner to take as a gift, an undeserved gift, what is freely given to him of God. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

XXXVI.

THE GODLY MAN AND THE HYPOCRITE CONTRASTED.

ISAIAH LVIII. 1-14.

It is plain that Jehovah himself speaks in this chapter, and that he speaks to the prophet, charging him to be still more urgent in pressing home upon the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem their great guiltiness and sin. In the preceding chapter, the prophet had addressed the more openly apostate portion of his countrymen,—those who, though professing to fear God, by observing some of the ordinances of divine appointment, did at the same time furnish such palpable proofs of the insincerity of their profession as rendered them rather avowed idolaters than concealed hypocrites. Hypocrites they no doubt were ; for they pretended to fear God, while God himself said of them that they lied in so doing. But they were open idolaters at the same time ; for they inflamed themselves “with idols under every green tree, slaying,” or sacrificing, “the children in the valleys under the cliffs of the rocks.” The charge against them, therefore, was easily established. They avowedly placed the ordinances of God on the same level with the abominable rites of idolatry. But there was another class whose hypocrisy was not so easily detected, and against whom the prophet was in this chapter especially commissioned to testify. And his commission was expressed in very strong language. He was commanded to cry aloud, and spare not ; to lift up his voice like a trumpet ; to show the people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their

sins;—language which did very emphatically declare what need there was for their being reproof, and how unwilling they were to listen to reproof. And their character, as here described, sufficiently accounts for all this. To outward appearance, they differed widely from vast multitudes of their countrymen, who openly worshipped the false gods of the nations. Not only had they resisted the tide of outward idolatry, which had carried multitudes away, but, to all appearance, they were zealous for the worship of Jehovah. “They seek me daily,” it is said in the 2d verse, “and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God : they ask of me the ordinances of justice ; they take delight in approaching to God.”

With such an outward profession, they must have been regarded by their countrymen at large as at least very bold and uncompromising, inasmuch as they held out for the worship of the true God alone against overwhelming numbers. In doing so, they must not only have encountered much opposition from the idolaters, with whom they were connected in the every-day business and intercourse of life ; but also, at times, under the reign of some of the kings, they must have endured something like persecution, by refusing to bow down to the gods whom the king and the court worshipped. All this, of course, mere superstition, and pride, and party spirit, might enable them to do and endure ; for in all ages of the world, these motives have been found very powerful in nerving men to suffer much with great apparent fortitude. Even good men will often find it difficult to determine, in particular cases, how far they have been actuated by some such motives as I have now stated, and how far the true fear of God was the principle which actuated them. In the case before us, therefore, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who thus stood out for the worship of Jehovah, while treated with contempt as stubborn and fanatical men by the idolatrous part of their countrymen, and respected, or it may be courted, by God’s true people, the faithful remnant, who not only worshipped Jehovah alone, but worshipped him in spirit and in truth ;—these men, I say, who thus adhered outwardly to the observance of divine ordinances, though their heart was not right with God, would naturally conclude that they must be the special fa-

vourites of God, as the true Israel, the seed of Abraham. And so they did think of themselves, as the prophet here tells us. They believed that, in virtue of their strict outward observance of the ordinances of the ceremonial law, they were entitled to all the blessings of the covenant sworn to Abraham, and of course to the fulfilment of all the temporal promises given to the descendants of Abraham. These temporal promises were, indeed, all that they cared for. Of the spiritual blessings secured by the Abrahamic covenant, they had no adequate or distinct conception. They thought only of temporal prosperity and comfort, and believed that God's favour consisted in the abundance with which these were bestowed upon them. They concluded, of course, that in strictly observing the ordinances of Moses, they had earned a right to these blessings,—that they had fulfilled the conditions on which they were originally given, and that, therefore, they were aggrieved if the promises were not fulfilled,—that is, if they did not experience deliverance from the temporal calamities under which they suffered, or with which they were threatened. And so they openly avowed, as we are here informed. They complained that though they had rigorously observed the divine institutions, and had even gone beyond what was expressly required of them, by voluntarily setting apart seasons of humiliation before God, yet they had not experienced the deliverance which they were entitled to look for, as promised to them in the covenant made with their fathers in Horeb: "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?"

It is not necessary, perhaps, to suppose of these hypocritical professors in Judah and Jerusalem, that they actually addressed God in such daringly presumptuous language as is thus ascribed to them. With all their self-righteousness and self-deception, they would hardly venture to do so. But it was the language of their heart. It expressed what they thought and felt; and He who searches the heart, and tries the reins, and knows the thoughts afar off, commissioned his servant the prophet to clothe their thoughts and feelings in words, and so to place palpably before them the real state of their heart and affections. We know not, for we are not told, how they received the prophet's representation, or how far they felt his reproof. But their conscience must

have testified that his representation was true; and his reproof might well have filled them with alarm. Independently of the solemn charge of hypocrisy with which it was followed up, it was fitted to place fully before them their daring impiety in questioning the divine rectitude, and alleging that God had dealt unjustly by them,—that he had falsified his promise,—and had withheld from them the blessings which he was bound to have granted them, as the reward of their faithful adherence to his ordinances. Unless they were hopelessly hardened in iniquity, they must have felt, when the prophet expressed in words their real sentiments and feelings, that he had disclosed to them what they did not before know, or, at least, would not have been very willing to confess, regarding the state of their heart. And if God were pleased now, as in the old time, to make direct communications to men,—were a prophet commissioned to address them, not according to what they profess to be, but according to what they really are,—how many similar and very sad disclosures would be made of men's hearts, not only to one another, but to themselves! Not only would those sinful affections, of which they cannot but be conscious, inasmuch as they are knowingly indulged,—not only would these be placed in a clearer light than they were ever before seen in, but others would be disclosed of which they were till then hardly aware, and would have been very unwilling to acknowledge. Many such do lurk in the human heart, and some of these not differing widely from those which were cherished by the men of Judah and Jerusalem. For is there not too much reason to fear that with many there is a secret dissatisfaction with the divine dispensations, accompanied, it may be, by a secret feeling that they had not been less upright, less benevolent, less religious than others, and that, therefore, they could not see any just reason why they should have fared worse than others in regard to the good things of this life. And were this feeling expressed in language,—were its meaning clearly and explicitly brought out in words,—how little would it differ from the sentiment here expressed: "Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?" And when so brought out and placed before men, they might, perhaps, be startled at the thought of having ever cherished so presumptuous a feeling,

and might not be very willing to acknowledge that they had done so.

Such, I have said, might be the disclosures which would be made to many, were they addressed by a prophet with an immediate commission from God, as the men of Judah and Jerusalem formerly were; and were we subjected to this trial, we might, perhaps, discover that the ingratitude and rebellion of these men was not altogether so peculiar and unexampled as we may at times have been disposed to think it. God is no longer pleased to deal with men as he formerly did, when by immediate communication he set their sins in order before them, and addressed them in the language of remonstrance and rebuke. But he has made provision, nevertheless, for accomplishing all this. He has put on record those communications, in which of old he showed his "people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins," and there men may see their own sins, and read their own character; for "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." Multitudes, it is true, are unwilling to recognise their own character, and fail to do so, however fully and plainly it is set before them. And so, I doubt not, did many of the Jews of old, even when directly addressed by the prophets. But as then many were, no doubt, brought under convictions, and not a few, perhaps, converted to God, so now multitudes are made to see and constrained to recognise their own character in the representations which are set before them in Scripture, and are brought in penitence and faith to confess their sins, and to betake themselves for refuge to Him through whom they may be forgiven. Such, the apostle tells us, is the design and the use of God's recorded dealings with his ancient people: "They are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." And, under the Spirit's influence, they will accomplish their purpose, for with that influence "the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

We have already seen that the prophet received a revelation from God, a message to Judah and Jerusalem, wherein the state of their mind and feeling towards God was expressed so fully

and faithfully as must have constrained their conscience to testify that it was true. And that state was such as might have led to the conclusion that God would at once and for ever give them up. Even if they had been as sincere as they were hypocritical, their language, whether they actually gave utterance to it, or whether it was the language of their heart, the expression of thoughts and feelings which they would not have dared to utter, —that language was so daringly presumptuous that it might have been supposed that nothing remained for them but to be given up to blindness of mind and searedness of conscience, left to reap the fruit of their own doings, and to be filled with their own devices. “Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?” And yet to this presumptuous question God was graciously pleased to reply, and, moreover, to remonstrate with them, showing them how little reason they had to charge him with being unfaithful to his promise. They complained that he did not see their fasting; they asked why it was that he took no notice when they afflicted their soul. His answer was, “Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.” This itself was fatal to their plea. They were insincere. It was a mere outward act with them. There was no fasting, no humiliation, no affliction of soul in the matter. In the midst of all their outward appearance of waiting on God, and humbling themselves in his sight, they relinquished nothing of their own personal gratifications, and they remitted nothing of their exactions in regard to their servants and dependents. They found their pleasure, and they exacted all their labours. Nor was this all. The very motive by which they were influenced, while professedly a regard for God’s supremacy, was altogether a selfish and a worldly motive: “Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness.”

It is difficult to determine with any thing like certainty all that may be implied in these expressions. To do this, we would require to know more particularly than we have been told, at what precise period in the long public life of Isaiah this reproof was administered, and what were the circumstances in which the visible Church then stood,—whether it was a time at which idolatry was largely prevalent, or whether it was during one of

the seasons of reformation, when, outwardly at least, numbers forsook the worship of idols, and professedly returned to the worship of the true God. But one thing, I think, is obvious, namely, that in adhering with apparent zeal and earnestness to the external observance of divine ordinances, they were actuated, not by any sincere regard for the glory of Jehovah, but by pride, and what is commonly understood by party spirit,—that feeling of self-exaltation which will prompt men to do a great deal, and even to suffer not a little, in the defence or for the spread of opinions which they have from any cause been led to adopt, and which they think it essential to their honour to maintain. It appears that thus it was with that portion of the people to whom the prophet's message was especially sent. Their ostentatious zeal for the ordinances of God was in fact zeal, not for his glory, and for the triumph of the true religion over the false, but for the triumph of their own opinions as such, and for victory over those who had espoused the cause of idolatry. Of course, there was, no doubt, mingled with this motive something like the conviction or belief that God could help and deliver them, or could bestow the blessings which they asked or wished for ; for even the blind and miserable votaries of idolatry believed all this of the false gods whom they worshipped. And if the professed worshippers of Jehovah believed that God could grant them what they wished for, then in their pride and presumption they would conclude that he was bound to do so,—bound to reward the extraordinary zeal and steadfastness with which they had adhered to his cause. And, as we have already seen, they did accordingly allege that they had been unjustly dealt by, because they had not experienced those tokens of the divine favour which they had confidently expected. But in all this they had no right or worthy conceptions of the divine character, and no regard for the divine glory. While observing, with apparently the most devout reverence, the ordinances of religious worship, bowing their “head as a bulrush,” and spreading sackcloth and ashes under them, they did in reality neither fast nor afflict their soul. They denied themselves none of their wonted indulgences ; and in their very humiliation they were gratifying their pride,—the pride of self-righteousness, and the pride of an expected triumph over those whom they regarded as

enemies or rivals. In all this, there were such a melancholy combination of hypocrisy, self-deception, and blindness to the plainest and most solemn requirements of the divine law, that we may be disposed, perhaps, as we too frequently are, to conclude, not only that their condition was utterly hopeless, but that the degradation of their character has been unexampled among those who have known and professed the true religion.

And yet, is there no reason to fear that the character here described has been, and still is, very frequently exemplified? Amidst the manifold controversies which from time to time agitate and divide the visible Church, is there no danger of men mistaking zeal for the side which they have espoused, for zeal in the cause of truth and God's glory? It cannot be doubted that the great truths of Scripture may be held by men as mere matters of opinion, without producing any saving impression on the heart, and that they may be maintained and defended with great zeal, like any other opinions which men may have embraced. Should circumstances occur, then, to awaken this zeal, and call it forth into exercise,—should those who hold the truths of Scripture merely as opinions which intellectually they have embraced, be required to maintain them against prevailing errors,—they may be induced to do so with great earnestness and activity, and, it may be, at the expense of considerable worldly sacrifice. But whatever zeal such men may feel or manifest, can it with any truth be called zeal for God's glory? Is it not zeal for their own opinions, just because they are theirs,—zeal for the cause of a party, because it is the cause which they have espoused? And if, while still strangers to the power of godliness, still without the saving knowledge of the truth, they should be cherishing,—which, I fear, is not unlikely,—some vague hope that it may avail them hereafter that they are contending on the side of truth, then wherein do they differ from those of whom the prophet here speaks? In degree they may differ,—that is to say, their self-seeking, and self-deception and hypocrisy may be less aggravated, or at least less palpable; but essentially their character is the same. And is there no danger of believers themselves sometimes mistaking their own motives, and ascribing to their love for the truth, and their zeal for God's glory, what, if carefully examined, might be

found to partake largely of some self-seeking motive? None ought ever to forget how prone all are to formality, and how often men draw near to God with the mouth, and honour him with the lips, while their heart goeth after its covetousness.

We have already seen, that in reply to the presumptuous complaint of Judah and Jerusalem, that God had falsified his promises to them, he was pleased, in his divine forbearance and condescension, to vindicate his procedure, and to show them why it was that they had not experienced those tokens of his favour which they had presumptuously expected. He set their sins in array before them, and showed that, by their hypocrisy, pride, and ungodliness, they had not only deprived themselves of the blessings which they professedly asked, but had forfeited all right to expect any interposition on their behalf. But the divine forbearance and compassion did not terminate here. He proceeded graciously to assure them, that, notwithstanding all their guilt and unworthiness, he was still ready to prove in their experience that he was the faithful and covenant-keeping God, by bestowing upon them, in all its fulness, every blessing which he had promised. In contrast with their hypocritical fasting, which was an abomination in his sight, he set forth the nature of the fast which he required, and which, if they had really feared, and confided in, and loved him, they would have practised: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" This is just the delineation of a godly man's practice,—the character of one who, having tasted of the loving-kindness of the Lord, was constrained to imitate towards his fellow-men the mercy and the kindness in which he had himself so largely shared. The duties here enumerated were in an especial manner required and expected of God's ancient people, in virtue of their being one family, interested in the same covenant, and partakers of the same temporal inheritance.

These verses may be regarded, therefore, as the description of a true believer or godly man, expressed in Old Testament lan-

guage. And what a contrast does it present to the hypocrites whom the prophet was commissioned to reprove! Yet even they were still invited to make trial of God's faithfulness, with the assurance that if they did so, if they returned to him in penitence and faith, and brought forth fruits meet for repentance, he would be found as ready as ever to fulfil towards them every good word which his mouth had spoken concerning Israel. And this assurance is given in language peculiarly strong and emphatic: "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee: the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward." Their sins had brought them very low; the dread of their enemies had involved them in perplexity and darkness; their strength also had been greatly weakened. But God was still able and still willing to enlighten their darkness, and to gird them again with strength. And the allusion to the pillar of cloud and of fire which accompanied their fathers in the wilderness was especially expressive and full of meaning. It reminded them through how many generations God had been faithful to his promise,—how many wonderful works he had done on their account,—and how many deliverances he had wrought on their behalf; and it assured them, moreover, that the same almighty power was pledged for their deliverance and protection in time to come. There was much, therefore, which they should have felt to be full alike of reproof and of encouragement in the promise, "Thy righteousness," that is, Jehovah thy righteousness, "shall go before thee: the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward." But it was not merely deliverance and protection which were promised them. They were assured that if they continued faithful to the Lord their God, they should rise to a state of great prosperity,—temporal prosperity as a nation, and spiritual prosperity as the Church,—so that on them should be conferred the honour of gathering in the nations into a participation in the blessings promised to Abraham: "The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places,"—the habitations of the heathen, who were still lying in the original ruins of the fall: "thou shalt raise up the

foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in."

Such were the blessings which were promised to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, in the event of their turning unto the Lord in penitence and faith, and laying hold on his covenant. In so far as the blessings thus promised were merely temporal, they are no longer secured to believers now. But the passage is, nevertheless, still full of instruction to the Church. It plainly intimates that there is a close connection between holiness of life and the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. Holiness of life, indeed, does not purchase these blessings as a reward; but there is a very intimate connection between keeping the commandments of God, and the extent to which believers will experience joy, and peace, and comfort, and good hope. And if at any time they are in darkness and discomfort, and are anxiously inquiring why it is so, they would do well to ask themselves, among other subjects of inquiry, whether they are keeping the commandments,—whether they are careful in watching against and resisting those temptations which they know to be most likely to overcome them,—and whether they are making conscience of faithfully discharging all the duties of their place and station. If believers were thus habitually exercised, their seasons of darkness would be fewer; and when they did come, light might sooner rise in their obscurity, and their "darkness be as the noonday." And there is one promise in this passage in the fulfilment of which the Church now may largely share,—I mean the promise of being the instrument of gathering in the nations,—the honour of being called "The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in." This was an honour which the Jews despised. They deemed it a degradation to receive Gentiles on a footing of equality with themselves, not perceiving, in their blindness, that it would have been their glory and their honour. Let the Christian Church beware how she estimates and improves the privilege which the Jewish Church threw away, and which has now been transferred to her; for assuredly it is her glory, and honour, and highest interest to contribute towards the extension of Christ's kingdom, making known his name through all the earth, and his "saving health among all nations."

I have had occasion to observe, that, in the verses which we have

now considered, there is the delineation of the character of a good man,—a man of practical godliness as contrasted with hypocrites and ungodly men. But we have here another feature still of that character, which seems reserved for the last, as if to intimate that it is a test of all the others,—a proof that every other virtue in that character is genuine. I refer to the observance of the Sabbath: “If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath,”—that is, from trampling or encroaching upon it,—“if thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” I need hardly remark, that the observance of the Sabbath, as here set forth, comprehends a vast deal more than merely abstaining from worldly occupations,—that it implies the exercise of the heart and the affections,—that this exercise is holy, yielding satisfaction and pleasure,—that the Sabbath is a very high and precious privilege,—and that the spiritual enjoyment of it is the same as delighting in God. Nor is this the only passage in Isaiah where the observance of the Sabbath is thus spoken of. In a preceding chapter, “keeping the Sabbath from polluting it,” is plainly used, I think, to express the whole of the first table of the law,—as indicating a heart right with God,—knowing and worshipping him as the true God and its God, and as glorifying him in all that whereby he maketh himself known. The Sabbath, then, even as enjoined upon the Jews, was something very different from what many have supposed,—a mere outward institution, which, if rigorously observed to the letter, by abstaining from all worldly occupations, was observed to the full extent of what was required. The Jews might think so of old, and men calling themselves Christians may think so now. But it is an impious calumny on God’s ordinance. He appointed the Sabbath to commemorate his work of creation; and he commanded all men to acknowledge it in that view, just as he commands all men to acknowledge him alone as the only living and true God. But he appointed it also as a type and pledge of the rest which

he has prepared for his Church,—his redeemed people,—even rest with himself,—a participation, according to their capacity, in his own blessedness,—a share in the rest in which he is represented in Scripture as being refreshed, when he contemplated the whole work of creation, and pronounced it very good.

From the beginning, therefore, and throughout the whole of the Old Testament dispensation, the Sabbath was a blessed privilege, a most precious pledge or promise; and true believers, instead of thinking it a mere restraint, which it was reasonable and lawful for them to endeavour to relax or evade, would be humbled at the thought that they did not value it more highly, and enjoy it with greater delight. All this is obvious from the verses we are considering; for we cannot suppose that God required of the hypocrites whom he reproved more than his own people had often felt it to be both their duty and their privilege to render. But he represents the observance of the Sabbath as consisting in their calling it “a delight, holy of the Lord, honourable,”—not surely their merely calling it so, for that would have been the very hypocrisy which he was condemning,—but feeling it to be “a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable,”—a day in the exercises of which they found wherewithal to quiet their troubled spirits, to soothe their sorrows, to realise God’s nearness to them as a gracious and reconciled God, and to anticipate that rest with him which was in reserve for them when present toils and troubles were at an end. This was the Old Testament Sabbath, the Jewish Sabbath, that which multitudes regard as another name for unnecessary, unreasonable, and oppressive restraint. And was it so? Was it a mere ceremonial, whereby God in his sovereignty saw meet to lay a painful restraint on man’s natural liberty? And if men submitted to that restraint, however reluctantly, did they thereby honour and keep holy the Sabbath? Verily not. They made no approach towards remembering the Sabbath-day to keep it holy; for they made no approach towards delighting themselves in God. If such outward abstaining from worldly work was all that was implied in the rest of the Sabbath, then assuredly the hypocrites, whom the prophet rebuked, would not have been open to reproof on that score; for they could not have boasted of their fastings and humiliations, and afflictings of their soul, and their rigorous ob-

servance of religious ordinances, if they had been openly setting at nought the ordinance of the Sabbath, which occupied from the beginning the first and most prominent place among all the divine institutions. But, like all the other religious ordinances, they made it a mere outward thing. It was not with them "a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable;" and therefore it was that, for their correction and instruction, the true nature and design of the Sabbath is here set forth.

And can the Lord's day be less precious now than the Sabbath was to the saints of old? It is still to us what it was to them,—a memorial of creation,—a type of the rest wherewith God was refreshed when creation was finished,—even the ineffable satisfaction with which he saw the glorious perfections of his nature, as manifested in the works of his hands. It is, moreover, a pledge to his people that they shall enter into his rest,—and a foretaste, also, of that rest itself. But the Lord's day is more than this. It is a memorial of the new creation, that for the accomplishment of which the Eternal Word did not merely speak and it was done, but became incarnate, and suffered, and died. It is an assurance that, after this fearful conflict, he has entered into his rest; and it is a new pledge to his people that they too shall rest with him. And in this view of the Sabbath, can we really ask whether the observance of it is binding on us? The question, methinks, should sound strangely in the ears of believing Christian men. Binding seems to imply,—and, I fear, does with many imply,—that if it could be proved that the observance of the Lord's day were not binding, it would be a great relief, a pleasing emancipation from bondage. But the observance of the Sabbath is binding notwithstanding. It is binding in the same sense as it is binding on all men to worship the one only living and true God, or as it is binding on all men to accept of eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ. And is that a hardship,—a state of bondage? If so, then it is a hardship to keep holy the day and observe the ordinances in which God especially promises to meet with his people, and to teach them, in their blessed experience, what it is "to delight themselves in the Lord."

XXXVII.

THE RENEWED APOSTASY OF ISRAEL.

ISAIAH LIX. 1-21.

IF we might judge of the prophet's state of mind and feeling from the nature of the communications which he was commissioned to deliver to his countrymen, we should conclude that he proceeded to deliver and to record the prediction in this chapter with great grief and heaviness of heart. There was presented to him such a view of the growing depravity of Judah and Jerusalem as must have grieved and vexed his righteous soul ; and there passed before him in vision such an accumulation of terrible judgments, which were inevitably to overtake them, as could not but fill his soul with the deepest sorrow and concern. Often, indeed, before, had he been commanded to set the sins of his countrymen in array before them ; and often, also, had he warned them of coming judgments. In the preceding chapters, for example, he had not only rebuked the profligacy of the more openly impious and profane, those who had apostatised to idolatry, but he had also dragged to light and exposed the hypocrisy of self-righteous formalists ; and plainly warned both classes, that unless they repented they should all surely perish. Still, we could conceive him cherishing the hope that their repentance was yet possible, and that in consequence of that repentance there might still be realised the glorious state of things there described as certainly to follow on their return in penitence and faith to God : "Then shalt thou delight thyself in

the Lord ; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father : for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." But after the prophet had given utterance to this glorious description of what might possibly be the condition of the professing people of God if they did really repent, it would appear that a revelation had been made to him, to the effect that their reformation was hopeless, and that the threatened judgments, therefore, were inevitable. The language of the first two verses of this chapter plainly indicates, I think, on the one hand, an earnest desire to vindicate the power and faithfulness of God, as both able and willing to deliver his people, if they would but turn to and trust him ; and, on the other hand, a melancholy anticipation of judgments, which he saw could not be averted. He was obviously unwilling to relinquish the hope that the state of purity and prosperity described in the preceding chapter might yet be realised in the Old Testament Church. But being compelled, by the revelation which he had received, to abandon that hope, and foreseeing, as a matter of absolute certainty, that in their national capacity, as the visible Church, they were to endure terrible judgments, he did once more solemnly protest, in opposition to their self-righteous presumption, that the cause of these judgments was not in God, but in themselves,—that he was as able and as willing as ever to hear, and help, and deliver, but that they did virtually reject his gracious proposals, and refuse to be delivered : "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save ; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear : but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." This was indeed a very solemn statement, exposing, on the one hand, the guilt of their obstinate perseverance in a course of disobedience and rebellion ; and, on the other hand, warning them what a fearful thing it would be to fall into the hands of the living God. And yet how gracious, how full of compassion, was this very warning, as indeed the divine threatenings frequently are ! It contained a plain and unequivocal assurance, that if they did still return unto God, they would find him to be what their believing and obedient fathers had ever found him, the faithful and covenant-keeping God. It was in fact a repeti-

tion, in another form, of the promise in the preceding chapter, that if they sought God in penitence and faith, their light should rise in obscurity, and their darkness should be as the noon-day.

The language which the prophet was here instructed to employ expressed an unwillingness on the part of God to withhold from his professing people the light of his countenance and the interposition of his arm, so that his very threatening involved in it a gracious invitation. To all this forbearance and kindness Judah and Jerusalem were insensible. But how full of consolation must it have been to the faithful few of that time ! And how encouraging should it be to the humble and contrite still ! The declaration was not applicable exclusively to the hypocrites and formalists of the Old Testament Church, nor to formalists alone of any time. It is a general declaration of God's method of dealing with all who profess to seek him, even his own people. If they sin,—that is, if they knowingly indulge in sin, and through the prevalence of worldly affections and desires become cold and formal, and cease for a season to be as earnest or as frequent in prayer as they were wont to be,—they will assuredly, sooner or later, have their season also of darkness and depression,—a season during which they will feel as if they were deserted, as if the Lord's arm were shortened, that it could not save, and as if his ear were heavy, that it could not hear. During their time of formality and spiritual deadness, they might go through with their usual exercises of prayer and reading the Scriptures, nothing doubting that they had done their duty, and that they were accepted. But when awakened by one or other of the innumerable means by which God knows how to quicken his backsliding children, they begin to feel that their formal observance of religious duties does not yield them the satisfaction which they once experienced in such exercises ; they will become, what for a time they had ceased to be, very earnest and very anxious. But for a time they may fail to find the comfort which they seek. They may feel as if they were forsaken,—as if God had cast them out of his presence, or at least had withdrawn from them the light of his countenance. And, to a certain extent, so he has. He is saying to them, as he said to his professing people of old, “The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save ;

nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear : but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." But in saying this, he leaves the door open for their return to him ; he tells them that the cloud which obscures the light of his countenance, and prevents them from enjoying a sense of his favour, may be removed, and that if they will return, and patiently wait for him, he will blot out as a cloud their sin, and as a thick cloud their transgression, and will again restore to them the joys of his salvation.

We cannot doubt that there were some in the prophet's day, faithful men, who, even in the anticipation of coming judgments, found comfort in the very warning here addressed to them, as plainly intimating that the Lord had no pleasure in the death of the sinner. They, too, might, to some extent, have been infected with the prevailing ungodliness, so as to have become lukewarm, and thereby to need reproof also ; and, indeed, we find them confessing as much towards the close of the chapter. But with regard to the people generally, it appears that they were hopelessly sunk in ungodliness and spiritual degradation. Their guiltiness was very emphatically expressed in the general statement, that their iniquities had separated between them and their God, and their sins had hid his face from them, that he would not hear. But the prophet proceeds to reckon up in detail these sins and iniquities, presenting a deplorable picture of human depravity and debasement : "Your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity ; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness." Here, as in other parts of Scripture, the sins with which the people were charged are represented as sins of the hands, the mouth, and the feet, intimating that as individuals all their powers and faculties were withdrawn from the service of God, and devoted to the service of sin ; and that as a community or people, every member of the social body was affected,—that all had gone out of the way. And this melancholy description is continued, sometimes literally, and sometimes in figurative language, down to the 9th verse, where the prophet begins to set forth the lamentable consequences of this prevailing ungodliness. Of the description itself I need hardly remark, that it conveys the idea of very gross immorality,

as well as daring profaneness, on the part of Judah and Jerusalem. But though their sins were greatly aggravated, because they were committed against much light, and in despite of many peculiar manifestations of divine goodness towards them, yet we must not suppose that the representation here given of their character is such as could apply to none but them, and that there was about them a perverseness which distinguished them from all other men. This were a very false conclusion ; for we find that when the apostle was directed to set forth the character of fallen man,—to describe sinners in their unregenerate state, whether Jews or Gentiles,—he quoted largely this very passage, and combined it with other similar passages of the Old Testament Scriptures,—for example, the 14th Psalm,—as presenting a true picture of mankind universally in their state of guilt and alienation from God. On the occasion to which I refer he was addressing Jews,—not, however, for the purpose of proving that they were worse than the rest of mankind, but to show that they were not better. And his statement, as recorded in the 3d chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, is to this effect, “What then? are we better than they?” that is, Are we Jews better than the Gentiles? “No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin: as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre: with their tongues they have used deceit: the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes.”

This is the testimony of the Spirit of God concerning the character, not of any particular community or class of men in certain circumstances, but of mankind universally, in their fallen and unrenewed condition; and it is, in substance, what the prophet has here said of his countrymen, both of his own time and of subsequent times. The apostle's representation, of course, does not mean that all unregenerate men, of all countries and of all times, have manifested their ungodliness in the actual

commission of all the crimes here enumerated. If they had, the human race would long ago have been extinct. Ten thousand restraints have been, and still are, laid on the ungodly passions of men, whereby these passions are prevented from so breaking forth as to be inconsistent with the very existence of society. Many of these restraints are imposed by mere selfishness,—a regard to worldly interest,—without any direct reference to the will of God as a rule, or to the glory of God as an end; for men discover, either from their own experience or from the example of others, that their present comfort and happiness will be more largely promoted by honesty, sobriety, and truth, than by fraud, violence, and falsehood. Other restraints, also, are more directly imposed by Him who maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and who restraineth the remainder of his wrath. Thus restrained, even ungodly men may exhibit in their character much that is amiable and praiseworthy, especially in communities where the revealed will of God is extensively or generally known. But should circumstances occur to remove or relax these restraints, it would very soon appear that the ungodly principles enumerated by the apostle are to be found in every unrenewed heart,—that all men “are gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable,”—that “there is no fear of God before their eyes.”

We are not to suppose, then, that the Jews of old were sinners above all other men, or that naturally they were more corrupt and perverse than other men. This remark is not intended to excuse, or in any degree to palliate their guilt. But it may be useful in guarding against the delusive idea, that they did so widely differ from the rest of mankind that their conduct can convey no warning to us, and that there is nothing applicable to us in the admonitions addressed to them. It is still true, however, that their guilt was peculiarly aggravated, inasmuch as they had broken through peculiar restraints, with which God had graciously hedged them about, and had abused mercies and privileges which had not been vouchsafed to any other people. They were threatened, therefore, with judgments of peculiar severity; and already they had begun to experience the execution of them. At the 9th verse, the prophet, speaking in the name of the Church, proceeds to set forth the state of distress to which the

people or nation was reduced, and in which the true people of God had their share. "Therefore," said they, "is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us,"—that is, judgment was not executed between them and their enemies for their vindication and deliverance: "we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noon-day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment,"—that is, for vindication or deliverance from the oppression of our enemies,—“but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us.” It is worthy of remark, that this representation of the helpless and apparently hopeless condition to which the people were brought, is expressed in almost the very language in which Moses pronounced one of the curses which would surely overtake Israel, in the event of their forsaking the Lord, and going after other gods to serve them, as recorded in the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy: "The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: and thou shalt grope at noon-day, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee." But desolate as was the condition of the people, and dark as their prospects were, the true people of God fully acknowledged the rectitude of the divine dispensations. Not only did they acknowledge that sin was the procuring cause of all the calamities which had already overtaken or still threatened them, but they confessed that the charge brought against the people was true, even to the full extent, of all the transgressions which the prophet had enumerated.

Nor did they exempt themselves from the charge. Though they had been preserved from apostasy, and did, no doubt, mourn over abounding iniquity with unfeigned sorrow, yet they had sins enough of their own also to confess, and sins which had gone to swell the amount of national guilt. They included themselves, therefore, in confessing the sins of Judah and Jerusalem, and pleaded guilty to the prophet's charge. After setting forth, as we have already seen, the miserable state to which they had been reduced, they proceed, at the 12th verse, to say, "For

our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; in transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth: and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey,"—that is, the good man is the object of contempt or of persecution. It will be observed of this confession that it is very full and unqualified. There is no attempt to palliate or explain away the aggravated guilt which had been contracted. Every thing is confessed which the prophet in his charge had accused them of. Nor did the true Church, or people of God, by whom the confession is uttered, make any complaint of the injustice which they suffered at the hand of the ungodly. That injustice must have been very grievous; for what could more emphatically express the idea of the weak and helpless suffering wrong at the hand of the strong and lawless, than the simple declaration, "He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey?" The expression implies, that the simple-minded, God-fearing man, was the object of almost universal contempt and ridicule, and even violence. It reminds us of what was foretold to be the treatment of the Saviour himself, when he said, by the mouth of the psalmist, in the 69th Psalm, "They that sit in the gate speak against me: and I was the song of the drunkards."

But whatever reason the people of God, whose confession was made by the prophet, might have for complaining of their fellow-men who reviled, and oppressed, and persecuted them, they had no reason to complain of God's dealings with them. And they did not complain. They overlooked second causes. They saw and acknowledged the rectitude of God in all the public calamities which had overtaken, or were yet to overtake them. They were satisfied, moreover, that in these calamities, where disorder and crime prevailed, they could not fail to have their share. And they were satisfied of this, not merely because, as members of the community or kingdom, they must participate in all the sufferings which affect the kingdom at large, but because their own

sins deserved more, far more, than they were required to suffer. It mattered not who were the immediate instruments of inflicting that suffering. They viewed it as coming from God, who employs even the ungodly to administer rebuke to his own people, and to be the instruments of inflicting chastisement on them. And seeing it in this light, they confessed that their own sins were the procuring cause of their suffering. And need I observe that this is the spirit of true penitents? Believers will admit that one of the most difficult, and I fear, therefore, one of the rarest attainments in the Christian life, is to be able to overlook second causes as regards their sufferings, and to look at these sufferings as salutary chastisements coming from God himself. There are few, perhaps, of the ordinary troubles and annoyances of life which may not, with a little ingenuity and some uncharitableness, be traced to what we think the enmity or unfairness of our fellow-men. And how prone are we all to indulge a feeling of resentment towards those who have thus injured us, and to justify that feeling as not only lawful, but right and befitting on our part, forgetting, all the while, that the suffering which we endure, and are so forward to resent, forms part of the discipline whereby our heavenly Father seeks to subdue, and humble, and make us fit for the enjoyment of that "inheritance which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away!"

Hitherto I have considered the passage before us mainly in reference to the time of the prophet himself, as setting forth the then prevailing sins of his countrymen, and the judgments which these sins were immediately to draw down upon them, and which indeed had already begun to be inflicted; and it would not be difficult to show, from a careful examination of the history of that time, as recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles, that there was enough, in the character and condition of the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to account for all that the prophet has here said, both as to the iniquity that then abounded in the land, and as to the miserable state to which the kingdom was reduced in consequence of that iniquity. All the sins here enumerated were then practised; and in consequence of these sins Judah was at times brought very low, exposed to the inroads of their enemies, and distressed, rather than strengthened, by the heathen nations whose assistance they

implored. But the passage is not to be confined to the time in which the prophet lived, or to the events of which he was himself a witness. It was a prediction,—a prophetic history,—extending to the termination of the Old Testament economy, when the Jews as a nation were rejected, and ceased to be the visible Church. The prophet saw that, notwithstanding occasional seasons of revival, when the people seemed to be awakened to a sense of their guilt, and under the pressure of affliction turned unto God, and when he again graciously interposed on their behalf, still there was to be no permanent or universal reformation. These seasons of revival were to be followed by times of growing ungodliness and hypocrisy, till at length it became necessary that, for the sake of the true Israel, the carnal Israel should be utterly rejected. While, therefore, the prophet's description of the backsliding and degeneracy of the people applied not only to his own time, but to all subsequent periods of abounding iniquity, it did especially apply to the close of the Old Testament dispensation, when the Jews, instead of being in their national capacity the Church of God, the preservers of the true religion amidst the idolatry of the world, had not only lost all right apprehensions of the truth,—those holy oracles that had been committed to them,—but had become the bitter enemies of pure and spiritual religion. And, in like manner, while the judgments threatened by the prophet were exemplified or partially fulfilled at various periods in the history of Judah, as in the defeats which they sustained in battle, the inroads on their country by their victorious foes, the oppression which they suffered at the hand of the enemy, and in their temporary captivity in the land of Babylon, these predictions did in an especial manner refer to the calamities which accompanied the final rejection of the Jews, when the curse pronounced by Moses was fulfilled, "The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; . . . and among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest."

To the prophet all this must have presented a very melancholy prospect; for in such a state of things as he foresaw in prophetic vision, what was to become of the true religion? or how could the faithful few, if there still were any such, continue to maintain a conflict for the truth against an apostate church, as well as against idolatrous and ungodly nations? The prophet had wit-

nessed enough in his own day, and had himself experienced enough, to show him how difficult it was for the people of God to maintain their testimony for the truth against overwhelming numbers, and how perilous their condition was when surrounded on all hands by ungodliness and immorality in every form. And what, then, would be the condition of the faithful remnant of the true Israel, in a state of deeper and more universal degeneracy than any thing that he had ever witnessed? But, amidst the darkness of this prospect, light broke in upon the prophet. He was himself comforted, and he was entrusted with a message of comfort to God's afflicted people. If the state of the true religion and the condition of the Church, as seen by the prophet, appeared to be more hopeless than at any former period, so the deliverance wrought for her was immeasurably to exceed in glory all former interpositions on her behalf. The prophet represents Jehovah himself as looking with wonder on the desolate and deserted state of his Church, helpless in herself, and seeing no prospect of deliverance or of help, and in this extremity making bare his holy arm on her behalf. This divine interposition is described in figurative but very expressive language. Jehovah is represented as a man of war, ready to defend his people, and to give them the victory over all their enemies, whether apostate Jews or idolatrous Gentiles, and so to prove himself the faithful and the covenant-keeping God, even at the very moment that he might appear to have forgotten the promise sworn unto Abraham: "And the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence."

The import of this language, as describing the nature and consequences of the promised deliverance, is more fully explained in the concluding verses of the chapter. The great Deliverer was Messiah himself, the "Redeemer" who was to "come to Zion," or appear on behalf of Zion, and of those that turned "from transgression in Jacob," that is, the true church, the spi-

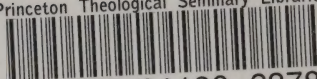
ritual Israel. And the consequence of his appearing is thus described, "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun: when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." In illustration of the meaning of this prediction, and to show how gloriously it was fulfilled, I would advert to the period immediately following the Saviour's crucifixion and death. What was the state of things at that period? where was the true religion? and what was the condition of the Church, as that must have appeared to the great enemy, who for a season had been permitted to work without restraint his malignant will? The Jews, in their national capacity, had ceased to be the Church of God,—nay, by the terrible deed which they had perpetrated, when with wicked hands they crucified and slew the Lord of glory, they had filled up the measure of their iniquity, and wrath was coming upon them to the uttermost. Yet they appeared for the time to have triumphed. Jesus, who alone could, and who would have revived the true religion, was the object of their hatred and persecution, because of his endeavours to do so, and they were permitted to succeed in their guilty purpose of putting him to death. Where, then, was the true religion? It was confined to a very few, and these few broken in spirit, involved in great doubt and perplexity, if not in terror and dismay. Those whom they had once looked up to as their spiritual guides, the only faithful interpreters of the oracles of God, had imbrued their hands in the blood of Him of whom they had fondly trusted that it was he who should have restored again the kingdom to Israel. But him they had seen crucified in weakness; and where, then, were they ever again to hear those words which, when spoken by him, they had felt to be the words of eternal life? In such a state of things, might not the great adversary suppose that he was about to gain a final triumph? that the true religion was to be for ever extinguished? and that the world was to be utterly and irretrievably overwhelmed in a flood of ungodliness? Never, perhaps, from the day that he seduced man into apostasy, did he think himself so near a full and complete triumph over all that was holy and spiritual in the earth. But when he was about to come in as a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against him. Principalities and powers were spoiled

by the very event which they thought had given them the victory. Christ was crucified in weakness, but he was raised in power; and with his resurrection, the cause, which seemed well-nigh crushed and ruined, not only revived, but assumed an aspect unspeakably more formidable to the powers of darkness than it had ever presented before. With a rapidity which no human wisdom, perhaps no created wisdom, could have anticipated, the despised followers of a crucified Master established his cause in almost every quarter of the civilised world. They were commissioned to wield an instrument of mighty potency, even the preaching of repentance and the remission of sins through the blood of the cross, whereby they set at liberty innumerable multitudes of the bond slaves of Satan, delivering them from darkness and bondage, and translating them into the light and liberty of the children of God; and thus saw in their own lifetime the fulfilment, to an amazing extent, of the prediction, "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun."

Though Israel were not gathered, yet Messiah was glorious in the eyes of the Lord; for with a remnant of Judah he gathered in Gentiles from every land, carrying salvation unto the end of the earth. And while the Church thus ceased to be limited to one nation, a new security was given, not only for her extension, but for her permanence. The maintenance of the true religion in the world is no longer bound up with the faithfulness of any one nation. Portions of the visible Church may become faithless to their trust, as the Jews did, and, like the Jews, they may forfeit and lose their privileges. And this should be a solemn thought to those nations that have long enjoyed the Gospel, and are but too ready to conclude that it is impossible they can ever lose it. But though such calamities may sometimes or even frequently occur, the Church is still secure; for it is to the New Testament Church that this promise is given: "This is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." There have been in time past, and we may expect that there will be in time to come, seasons of decay and spiritual declension, not in one portion only of the visible Church,

but it may be in several at the same time ; and to those who really love Zion, and are jealous for the honour of her King, the prospect may at such times be dark and discouraging. But they must also remember that such seasons have often been followed by revivals the most unexpected, and these by means the most unlikely ; so that when vital godliness and spiritual religion seemed to be on the point of being overwhelmed by formality and ungodliness, there was a fulfilment of the promise, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." The Church, then, has great encouragement to plead this promise, and so have believers individually ; for how often has it not been fulfilled in their experience ! How often have they, in the good providence of God, been spared trials which would have been very perilous to their spiritual interests ! How frequently has even a painful disappointment broken the bonds of worldliness by which they were about to be entangled ! In how many instances have they been delivered, in a way that they could not have expected, from difficulties and trials which they could not anticipate without alarm ! How often have they been strengthened, beyond their expectations and their hopes, for the discharge of duties so painful that, in their faithlessness, they would have been ready to evade them ! And on how many occasions has the Word of God come to them with a power and energy sufficient to bear down those vain and sinful imaginings which so frequently make a forcible entrance into the mind, and lead it captive to much sin, and consequently subject it to much suffering ! All these experiences are so many encouragements to believers to plead, and to expect for themselves personally, and for the Church, the fulfilment of the promise, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

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